

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Mind Management in Work*

One of the greatest lessons I have learnt in my life is to pay as much attention to the means of work as to its end. He was a great man from whom I learnt it, and his own life was a practical demonstration of this great principle. I have been always learning great lessons from that one principle, and it appears to me that all the secret of success is there; to pay as much attention to the means as to the ends. Our great defect in life is that we are so much drawn to the ideal, the goal is so much more enchanting, so much more alluring, so much bigger in our mental horizon, that we lose sight of the details altogether. But whenever failure comes, if we analyse it critically, in ninety-nine percent of cases we shall find that it was because we did not pay attention to the means. Proper attention to the finishing, strengthening, of the means is what we need. With the means all right, the end must come. We forget that it is the cause that produces the effect; the effect cannot come by itself; and unless the causes are exact, proper, and powerful, the effect will not be produced. Once the ideal is chosen and the means determined, we may almost let go the ideal, because we are sure it will be there, when the means are perfected. The means are the cause; attention to the means, therefore, is the great secret of life. We also read this in the Gita and learn that we have to work, constantly work with all our power [and]



put our whole mind in the work. At the same time, we must not be attached. That is to say, we must not be drawn away from the work by anything else; still, we must be able to quit the work whenever we like. If we examine our own lives, we find that the greatest cause of sorrow is this: we take up something, and put our whole energy on it—perhaps it is a failure and yet we cannot give it up. That is the whole secret of existence. We are caught though we came to catch. We came to enjoy; we are being enjoyed. We came to rule; we are being ruled. We came to work; we are being worked. All the time, we find that. And this comes into every detail of our life. We are being worked upon by other minds, and we are always struggling to work on other minds. We want to enjoy the pleasures of life; and they eat into our vitals. We want to get everything from nature, but we find in the long run that nature takes everything from us—depletes us, and casts us aside.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,
(Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 2.1-2.



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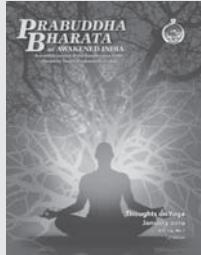
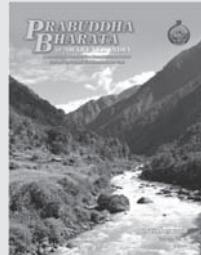
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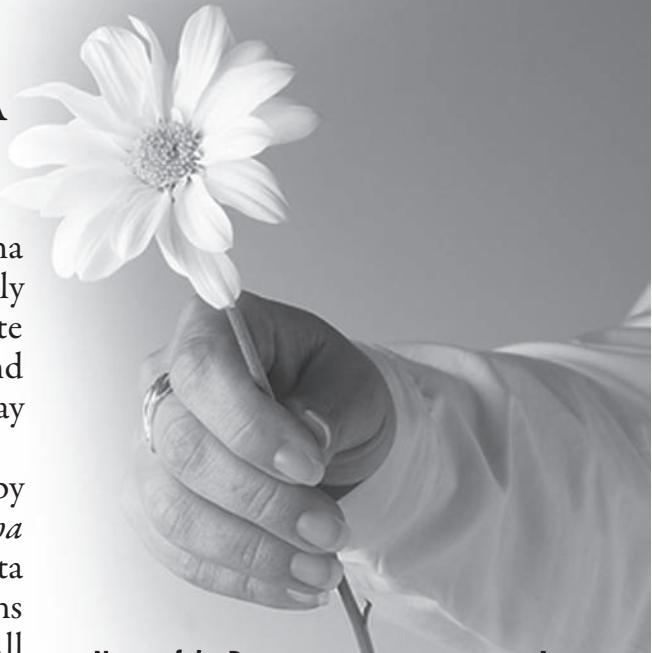
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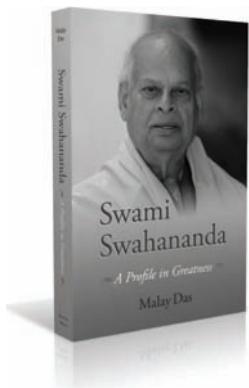


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SWAMI SWAHANANDA

A Profile in Greatness

by Dr. Malay Das



Pages: 234 | Price: ₹ 80
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The spiritual head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California for thirty-six years, Swami Swahananda, a direct disciple of Swami Vijnanananda, worked ceaselessly to spread Sri Ramakrishna's message. He established seventeen centers and sub-centers throughout the United States and has left the Ramakrishna movement in the West a rich legacy.

In this intimate, loving portrait, Dr. Malay Das presents Swami Swahananda as he knew him during the last seventeen years of the swami's life. We witness the guru's compassionate care for devotees and disciples, his ability to love with detachment, and his dignity and grace during his final illness.

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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

February 2019
Vol. 124, No. 2

Maitrayaniya Upanishad

मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

अथान्यत्राप्युक्तं द्वे वाव ब्रह्मणो अभिध्येये शब्दश्चाशब्दश्चाथ शब्देनैवाशब्दमाविक्षियतेऽथ तत्र ओमिति-
शब्दोऽनेनोर्ध्वमु-क्तान्तोऽशब्दे निधनमेत्यथाहैषा गतिरेतदमृतमेतत् सायुज्यत्वं निर्वृतत्वं तथा चेत्पथ
यथोर्णनाभि-स्तन्तुनोर्ध्वमुक्तान्तोऽवकाशं लभतीत्येवं वाव खल्वसा अभिध्याता ओमित्यनेनोर्ध्वमुक्तान्तः
स्वातन्त्र्यं लभतेऽन्यथा परे शब्दवादिनः ।

॥ ६.२२ ॥

*Atha-anyatrapy-uktam dve vava brahmano abhidhyeye shabdash-cha-ashabdash-cha-atha
shabdenaiva ashabdam avishkriyate'tha tatra omiti shabdo'enordhvam utkranto'shabde
nidhanam-ety-atha-ahaisha gatir-etad-amritam-etat sayujyatvam nirvritatvam tatha chety-atha
yathorna-nabbis-tantunordhvam-utkranto'vakasham labhatityevam vava khalvasa abhidhyata
omity-anenordhvam-utkrantah svantantryam labhate'nyatha pare shabdavadinah.* (6.22)

And thus it has been said elsewhere: ‘There are indeed two Brahmans to be meditated upon, sound and non-sound. By sound alone is the non-sound revealed. Now here the sound is Om. Moving upward by it one comes to ascend in the non-sound. So this is the way, this is immortality, this is complete union and also tranquillity. And now as the spider moves upward by the thread, obtains free space, thus certainly indeed, the meditator moving upward by the syllable Om obtains independence.’ Other expounders of the sound as Brahman think otherwise.

(6.22)

THIS MONTH

VARIOUS TOPICS become the fad of the day. Trends and viral phenomena have spiralled in this age of burgeoning social media. What should be the existential fad and what should become viral in human societies is discussed in #moksha.

Swami Atmapriyananda, vice chancellor, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (RKMVERI), attempts to capture Sister Nivedita's understanding of Swami Vivekananda in **Sister Nivedita—Her Understanding of Swami Vivekananda**.

Swami Satyapriyananda, a former editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, presently residing at Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math emphasises the importance of discernment, detachment, and renunciation in spiritual life in **Spiritual Quest**.

Courage finds expression in an infinite number of ways in our day-to-day life. Wherever there is lack of courage, life ceases to be worth the name. It is no better than mere vegetation. At present we are living in an era of automaton conformity to the majority or group. The idea of conformity has dissipated so much into our being that we never feel to question its validity. But at the same time we feel the prick of conformity to a group or majority. When this conformity is related to an overt authority, we express our pent up feelings against that authority through rebellion or violence. But the case becomes tough when the authority demanding our conformity is a covert one, namely, society, market, 'common sense', public opinion, economic necessities, and so on. One cannot

crusade against an anonymous authority. Under the spell of this anonymous authority one has to present oneself in a way approved by the group. Such conformity gives rise to existential problems. Swami Kritarthananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, analyses various aspects of **The Courage to Be Human**.

The young have wonderful insights on various issues. In *Young Eyes*, such insights are brought to the readers every month. This month, Aadrika Chattopadhyay, a school student of class four from Kolkata, shares her insights on pet dogs in **How I Look at Dogs**.

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Bhagavan**. Understanding this popular word is necessary to understand its meaning.

We suffer because of our desires and attachments. Thus, we ourselves create our bondage. This is explained in the second and concluding instalment of the story **Self-created Bondage**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Anmika Kathaigal*.

Joel Brockner, the Phillip Hettleman Professor of Business at Columbia Business School, the author of *A Contemporary Look at Organizational Justice* and *Self-Esteem at Work*, and the co-author of *Entrapment in Escalating Conflicts*, has written the book **The Process Matters: Engaging and Equipping People for Success**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

EDITORIAL

#moksha

IT IS QUITE TRENDY TO FOLLOW what is trending these days. One wears what is the fashion, talks what is the fad, eats in places that are happening, watches movies that have rave reviews, buys mobile phones with highest star ratings, and sheepishly surrenders one's wit and will to the scales of five-star markings, 'most likely' to 'least likely', serials of one to ten, and all other such euphemistically foolish human inventions of mass subordination. What has happened to the human ability to think, one might wonder. In a race to prove to be better than the others, in a race to find concurrence with others, and also in desperate attempts to be liked and loved, human beings are being engulfed in a vicious whirlpool of trending topics and viral phenomena.

How does something trend? How does something go viral? For something to trend or go viral, two things are necessary: the arising of a new creation and the acceptance of this creation by a large number of people. Any such creation could be an artistic creation, some work of utility, or could even be a thought or idea. One who creates this creation has to have some kind of inspiration to accomplish this feat. Though the degrees of subtlety or finesse of the creation might vary, the creator should feel the inspiration from within.

Integral to the phenomena of trending or going viral is the willingness or ability of the creator to share one's creation. Unexpressed gems of thought or hidden works of art can never reach a person other than the creator, much less become

trending or viral. A person should then, first feel the inspiration or even a need for creating something and then, also consider it important to

Hashtag moksha should be our call to ourselves and a wisdom shared with others.

share such a creation. This act of sharing only increases the value of that thing to the creator, because in true sharing, one acknowledges the fact that the thing shared is, or could be, of the same significance to others as it is to the creator.

This is quite opposite to the general perception that something that is personally important to someone should not be shared with others, to preserve the sanctity of personal memories, thoughts, and feelings. However, do these so-called personal memories, cherished moments, connections, or relationships give true happiness or joy or is it the connection of our self or being that adds joy to the otherwise mundane commonalities of life? In truth, these personal somethings are not existentially important to us. That is why we do not want to share them. Without our 'I' connected to these things, they lose all meaning. On the other hand, we do share wisdom of all kinds. Human beings shared the wisdom of fire and the wheel. We humans have an inborn tendency to network. And through the networks that we create, we share all existential wisdom.

Thus, it is not enough if the creator has a creation and the willingness to share it, but that creation should be existentially relevant. Then

arises the natural question whether the innumerable songs, videos, tweets, memes, and other such countless phenomena are existentially necessary for human beings. These things are by themselves, of course, not necessary for us, but the feelings of humour, togetherness, love, and a host of other such human emotions are definitely existential to the human condition. That explains why a creation willingly shared by a creator is accepted by others. This acceptance comes due to the shared need for the diverse human faculties.

On a closer look, though, one immediately understands this sharing and acceptance to be mere dabbling on the surface of human existence. As is well-known, it is death that is certain in human life. Similarly, it is suffering that is the common denominator of all stages of the human existence. However, one would be surprised at the obtuse nature of the general human intellect that fails to comprehend this all-pervasiveness of suffering in every moment of human life. Had it not been the case, Lord Buddha would not have had to proclaim to the world the obvious truth that there is suffering in this world. He was only repeating what numerous seers and rishis before him had told to the world.

This idea of suffering has a corollary idea of a way that leads us out of this suffering. The first task at hand is to understand that suffering pervades every moment of our lives and then to understand that we have to have a completely different outlook on and understanding of every moment of our lives. When we have the correct understanding of our selves, this universe, and our lives, we would know that there was no suffering in the first place, and that all this suffering was created due to our wrong understanding.

This idea of suffering and a way out of it is the creation of great experimenters of reality, whom

we call sages and saints. They went out of their way to share this twin idea with the world; they wanted to share their bliss with others. Uncountable incarnations and prophets have flooded this world with their wisdom; more will come in the future. But, it is a pity and a great loss, a great misfortune, that this twin idea of the problem and the solution has not been accepted by the masses, that it has not started trending or not gone viral. The reason is contained in the twin idea itself, suffering, or more accurately, the suffering of the ignorance of the truth of suffering. To draw a parallel from present times, this is much like a person being oblivious of some ailment, who has to be told of this suffering by a doctor after conducting many investigations, and then the person starts suffering or starts being aware of the suffering.

This twin idea of suffering and moksha needs to trend today more than ever in the history of humanity. We have created an impenetrable labyrinth of illusions within illusions, concentric circles within concentric circles, whirlpools in whirlpools of misery, series within series of lies, and have marred a clear vision of our perfect selves with fleeting dreams, foggy as ever. Swami Vivekananda promised us that he would continue to work till every being in this universe realises its identity with God. While we have made Swamiji, the person, a trending topic, and while many of his utterances are going viral, have we or should we not accept the need to know that we are one with God? Why are we embroiling ourselves in this deep mire of murk? Why do not we see light that is beckoning us to be seers? Let us trend this moksha, let us tweet mukti, let us make this twin idea viral. #moksha should be our mantra till we find light, till we find that one answer to all questions. Hashtag moksha should be our call to ourselves and a wisdom shared with others.



Sister Nivedita— Her Understanding of Swami Vivekananda

Swami Atmapriyananda

JOSEPHINE MACLEOD, Swami Vivekananda's American disciple who chose to call herself a 'friend' rather than a disciple, described his personality in an aphoristic sentence as follows: 'The thing that held me in Swamiji was his *unlimitedness*. I never could touch the bottom—or top—or sides. The amazing size of him! ... Oh, such natures make one so free. ... It is the Truth that I saw in Swamiji that has set me free!'¹ Meditation on any aspect of this multi-faceted genius is a highly rewarding exercise and it could indeed set us free! In fact, the profundity and complexity of Swamiji's personality and thoughts, at once full of simplicity and perspicuity, are best understood through the lens of his disciples who lived with him closely, listened to his talks day in and day out, saw him in his sublime as well as normal moods, meditated upon his personality and words with utmost reverence by bringing their hearts and minds in unison. One such outstanding disciple among his western disciples is Sister Nivedita, through whose eyes our ordinary and dull minds could have a powerful glimpse of Swamiji's gigantic and multi-faceted personality.

Understanding Swamiji is a task that baffles us and we stop at just admiring and adoring him! Swamiji himself said at the very end of his life: 'If



there were another Vivekananda, he would have understood what Vivekananda has done!'² I believe that it was only his divine Master, Sri Ramakrishna, who understood him fully. The wonderful and enigmatic fact is that Swamiji himself did not understand himself fully because of the divine play of his Master who put a veil over him in order to prevent him from understanding himself. Sri Ramakrishna said: 'The day he knew his real nature, he would give up the body through Yoga, by an act of will' (1.80).

One of the chief concerns of Sri Ramakrishna was that his beloved Narendranath, Swamiji's pre-monastic name, should be prevented from knowing his own real nature and Sri Ramakrishna's other monastic disciples—Swamiji's brother-disciples—were specially mandated to see that Swamiji

did not lapse into that divine mood in which the veil that was thrown over him by divine will, to prevent him from having a revelation about his real nature, was rent asunder! Swamiji, speaking about his Master Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘You see, the fact is that Shri Ramakrishna is not exactly what the ordinary followers have comprehended him to be. He had infinite moods and phases. Even if you might form an idea of the limits of Brahmajnana, the knowledge of the Absolute, you could not have any idea of the unfathomable depths of his mind!’³ The same could be said, in a lesser measure, of Swamiji himself—‘O, the amazing size of him!’ as Josephine MacLeod exclaimed in wonder and amazement. This is perhaps an echo what Sri Krishna said in the Bhagavadgita: ‘Some see It [the Atman] as a wonder, some speak of It as a wonder, some hear about It as a wonder, [but alas] none knows It [even] after hearing about It.’⁴ Swamiji, indeed, is such a wonder!

Being trained and educated in the West and having had the privilege of being re-trained and re-educated by Swamiji, her illustrious Master in the East, Sister Nivedita represents a unique and beautiful blend of the best elements of the East and the West as envisioned by his Master Swamiji. In actualising this vision of Swamiji, Sister Nivedita contributed immensely to creating a blend of the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of India—its mysticism and inward contemplative approach—energised and reinforced by the dynamism and creativity of modern science and technology of the West. Her scholarship was as vast as it was intense and her feeling heart blended beautifully with her scintillating intellect. Combined to both was her fearless and bold approach in executing what she thought and felt was for the good of India, which she adopted as her motherland. It is this unique combination that her Master Swamiji gifted to her—the heart to feel, the brains to conceive, and the hands to

work—bhakti, jnana, and karma, that made Sister Nivedita a unique model, a guiding spirit during her fairly short life on this earth and after her death, she continues to remain an eternal source of inspiration particularly to our women—to inspire, enlighten, and to empower them in their journey towards greatness and glory at the individual and the collective levels.

A gigantic and multifaceted personality like Swamiji cannot be understood through intellectual powers of comprehension alone. One needs to bring the intuitive faculty, merge the heart in the mind—*mano bridi niruddhya* as the Gita (8.12) puts it and through the multi-pronged attempt of the blended powers of heart, higher intuition, and mind—*brida, manisha, manasa-abhiklipto*, in the words of the *Katha Upanishad*—one could catch a glimpse of the infinite dimensions of this cosmic person although appearing confined in this finite human frame by a blend of these three.⁵

Sister Nivedita could, to a large extent, achieve this level of intuition that enabled her to be blessed with a peep into the mind and heart of the world prophet of infinitely ‘amazing size’ as Josephine MacLeod put it. She could accomplish this understanding largely through merging her own little personality in that vastness, infinity, that Swamiji himself was. In this erasing of her own little personality for which she struggled and struggled for years, Nivedita was blessed with a glimpse of Swamiji’s personality. She was granted access to Swamiji’s infinite storehouse of spiritual and philosophical thoughts of rarest wisdom arising in this amazing mind endowed with a penetrating insight. What were the essential components in Nivedita’s understanding of Swamiji? The answer to this question, albeit sketchy, is being attempted in this article.

Nivedita’s understanding of Swamiji has two dimensions: one, her understanding of

Swamiji's personality; and two, her understanding of Swamiji's philosophy. A glimpse of her understanding of Swamiji's personality has been given before. Now, Nivedita's understanding of Swamiji's philosophy was as profound as her understanding of Swamiji's personality. I give below some of Nivedita's understanding of Swamiji's personality and later move on to her understanding of Swamiji's teachings and philosophy.

The very first vital understanding of Swamiji that made Nivedita unique among Swamiji's disciples was that Swamiji was inseparably tied to Sri Ramakrishna. Very few of Swamiji's own followers and disciples could understand, in his own lifetime, that Ramakrishna-Vivekananda were twin souls come to redeem humankind, two in one and one in two, inseparable. The signature that Nivedita standardised and retained even after she had to formally quit the Ramakrishna Mission itself in reverential obedience to her guru's firm dictate that no member of the Mission can indulge in active politics, is now well known: N of RK-V—Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Swamiji would rarely discuss his guru Sri Ramakrishna with his disciples unless they were highly intimate and had the subtle understanding to fathom the depth of his personality and the ultimate source of his power and inspiration.

Swamiji told Nivedita during a sea voyage: 'He [Sri Ramakrishna] is the method, that wonderful unconscious method! He did not understand himself... But he lived that great life—and I read the meaning.'⁶ This was such a rare revelation that shows Swamiji as just an image cast in the mould of Sri Ramakrishna, as 'his Master's voice' whose significance is profound so much so that Nivedita considered that 'this one talk of my Master had been well worth the whole voyage, to have heard' (169).

Thus, from Nivedita's own writings one could surmise that Nivedita clearly knew this divine

source of Swamiji's power which was Sri Ramakrishna. Another person who knew this was Mrs Ole Bull, a fact that Swamiji himself acknowledged. He wrote to Mrs Bull in a letter: 'You have been one friend with whom Shri Ramakrishna has become the goal of life—that is the secret of my trust in you. Others love me personally. But they little dream that what they love me for is Ramakrishna; leaving Him, I am only a mass of foolish selfish emotions.'⁷ Sister Nivedita could realise the role of Swamiji as a playmate and helpless instrument of Sri Ramakrishna in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda divine play, *lila*. Nivedita's own words are worth quoting in this context:

In his Master, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, living and teaching in the temple-garden at Dakshineshwar, the Swami Vivekananda—'Naren' as he then was—found that verification of the ancient texts which his heart and his reason had demanded. Here was the reality which the books only brokenly described. Here was one to whom Samadhi was a constant mode of knowledge. Every hour saw the swing of the mind from the many to the One. Every moment heard the utterance of wisdom gathered superconsciously. Everyone about him caught the vision of the divine. Upon the disciple came the desire for supreme knowledge 'as if it had been a fever'. Yet he who was thus the living embodiment of the books was so unconsciously, for he had read none of them! In his Guru, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Vivekananda found the key to life (i.xvi).

The second understanding of Nivedita, flowing from the first mentioned above, was that Swamiji's mission on earth was the same as Sri Ramakrishna's own mission—to awaken humankind to the realisation of their innate divinity and to realise their oneness with the Infinite. Nivedita's comments on Swamiji's vision: 'He, indeed, had the generosity to extend to the West, the same gospel that the Indian sages had preached in the past to

the Indian people—the doctrine of the Divinity in man ... He was for ever finding new ways to express his belief that all men alike had the same vast potentiality.⁸ The words of blessings that Sri Ramakrishna uttered to humanity just a couple of months before he passed away may be recalled in this context: ‘May you all be illumined!’⁹ It was to Nivedita that Swamiji revealed this aspect of his mission, that was the same as of his guru Sri Ramakrishna, when he wrote to her: ‘My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.’¹⁰

The third understanding of Nivedita was the spiritual dimension of Swamiji’s personality, his scaling the Everest of spiritual realisation, namely, *nirvikalpa samadhi* by the grace of his guru Sri Ramakrishna and his forced climb down therefrom again at the loving behest of his guru for the spiritual amelioration and emancipation of humankind wallowing in the mire of worldliness and crying in intense despair and sorrow. Not many of Swamiji’s western disciples possessed knowledge of this aspect of his personality—his unfathomable spiritual dimension rarely accessible to ordinary minds. That was the real Swamiji, this innocent child of Sri Ramakrishna as he himself revealed on rare occasions.

In a remarkable letter dated 18 April 1900 to Miss Josephine MacLeod, who he nicknamed ‘Joe’, Swamiji laid bare this confession—revelation of his ‘true nature’ in the following words: ‘After all, Joe, I am only the boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Ramakrishna under the Banyan at Dakshineswar. That is my true nature; works and activities, doing good and so forth are all superimpositions’ (6.431). Sri Ramakrishna literally poured himself, emptied himself, into his beloved Naren on the eve of his passing away and that, reinforced with Swamiji’s own intense spiritual

practices, made him the veritable embodiment of spiritual power, a dynamo of spiritual energy, who had the extraordinary capacity to transmit it and transform people by a mere touch.

Swamiji said: ‘Accumulate power in silence and become a dynamo of spirituality’ (7.61). Romain Rolland wrote, in his famous biography of Swamiji: ‘He was the personification of the harmony of all human energy.’¹¹ This energy, though flowing through a human channel, was in reality the spiritual power that Swamiji had accumulated over decades of spiritual practice and the power that Sri Ramakrishna had poured into him. Nivedita understood this dimension of Swamiji’s personality through her own spiritual wisdom as well as by being a recipient of Swamiji’s spiritual power through his transforming touch. She describes this rare moment of benediction in the following words:

He lifted his hands and blessed, with silent depths of blessing, his most rebellious disciple, by time kneeling before him. ... It was assuredly a moment of wonderful sweetness of reconciliation. But such a moment may heal a wound. It cannot restore an illusion that has been broken into fragments. And I have told its story, only that I may touch upon its sequel. Long, long ago, Sri Ramakrishna had told his disciples that the day would come when his beloved ‘Noren’ would manifest his own great gift of bestowing knowledge with a touch. That evening at Almora, I proved the truth of his prophecy. For alone, in meditation, I found myself gazing deep into an Infinite Good, to the recognition of which no egoistic reasoning had led me. I learnt, too, on the physical plane, the simple everyday reality of the experience related in the Hindu books on religious psychology. And I understood for the first time, that the greatest teachers may destroy in us a personal relation only in order to bestow the Impersonal Vision in its place.¹²

As to Nivedita’s profound insight into

Swamiji's teachings and philosophy, it may be said that it was to Nivedita that Swamiji revealed some of his marvellous insights born of his deep realisation of his mission in life. I would cite later a few examples of this rare insight of Nivedita as revealed by her in her magnum opus, *The Master As I Saw Him*, containing rare gems of thoughts collected by Nivedita, by diving deep into the fathomless ocean of Swamiji's mind and heart.

Insight One: Swamiji's Ideal Aphoristically Conveyed to Nivedita

What was Swamiji's ideal in life? What exactly did he teach? The following famous and oft-quoted statements about what Swamiji considered his ideal in life was revealed by him to Nivedita: 'My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.'¹³ Innate divinity of man, what Swamiji called the 'potential divinity of the soul' is one of the cardinal principles of Swamiji's teachings, whose implications are as vast as they are deep. Swamiji repeatedly mentioned that he spoke nothing but the Upanishads. He said: 'If you look, you will find that I have never quoted anything but the Upanishads. And of the Upanishads, it is only that One idea, strength' (8.267). Swamiji was so fond of Upanishads and wanted to revive the Upanishadic culture of thought in India. He wanted to bring the Puranic India back to the Upanishadic India. Why was that? Swamiji himself answered it by saying that the Upanishads are the source of strength because the Upanishads steer clear of all the dogmas and doctrines, all the various creeds and theories, and help us directly encounter the supreme Reality which is identical with the Reality in every being.

When Swamiji phrased his philosophical thought in the simple aphorism, 'each soul is

potentially divine' he was articulating one of the most fundamental ideas of Vedanta. He wanted the Indian civilisation and the world civilisation to be based upon this particular idea of the divinity of human soul. In addition to this fundamental idea, there is another fundamental idea that he made the bedrock of his philosophical thought structure and that is 'oneness of all existence' or 'solidarity of the universe'. In his famous *Lectures from Colombo to Almora* delivered immediately on his triumphal return from the West in 1897, he hammered these two ideas in almost every lecture: the divinity of the soul and the oneness of all existence or the solidarity of the universe.

When he spoke in Madras, Swamiji said: 'I need not tell you today, men from Madras University, how the modern researches of the West have demonstrated through physical means the oneness and the solidarity of the whole universe' (3.188). In his famous paper on Hinduism presented in the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893 at Chicago, which is one of the very few pieces that he actually wrote—and we know Swamiji wrote very little except his letters that have become immortal, but he spoke much—he writes about, three kinds of monism, which I believe is one of the greatest contributions of Swamiji to the modern thought and world civilisation.

Monism or Advaita is usually spoken of in the spiritual sense. All of us know that Acharya Shankara, one of the greatest exponents of Advaita, talked about Atman-Brahman *aikya*, the oneness or the identity of the Atman, which is the individual consciousness; and Brahman, which is the universal supreme Consciousness. All the schools of Vedanta talk about Brahman-Atman relationship in varying degrees but the sum and substance of all these schools is the fundamental divine nature of the human soul. We

need not debate on whether it is a part of the supreme Consciousness, or one with the supreme Consciousness, or eternally different but subordinate to the supreme Consciousness—the three Vedantic schools of Vishishtadvaita, Advaita, and Dvaita hold these three views respectively—but focus on the fundamental idea of the divinity of the soul and blend it with the idea of the oneness of all existence, arrive at the grand conclusion that all that is, is divine; all that is, is pervaded and interpenetrated by divinity.

Now, Acharya Shankara spoke about the identity of Atman and Brahman in a spiritual sense, and he said that the essence of the Vedanta is the realisation of the identity of the Atman and Brahman which is spoken of in the Upanishads. According to him the Upanishads spoke about the identity of the individual soul and the universal Spirit, Atman-Brahman *aikya*, which is aphoristically stated in the famous *mahavakyas*, the great sayings of Vedanta, namely, ‘*Aham brahmāsmi*; I am Brahman’,¹⁴ ‘*Tattvamasi*; you are that’,¹⁵ ‘*Ayamatma brahma*; this Atman is Brahman’,¹⁶ and ‘*Prajnanam brahma*; Consciousness is Brahman’.¹⁷

Swamiji applied this wonderful idea expanding its scope to cover the entire spectrum of existence—physical, mental, and spiritual planes. This, we may say, is one of his greatest contributions to world thought in the modern age. This realisation of the all-encompassing application of *mahavakyas* interpreted in a very modern sense, Swamiji believed, would bring about material and intellectual upliftment as well as spiritual emancipation. In that famous paper that he wrote and read out at the World’s Parliament of Religions, the ‘Paper on Hinduism’, he speaks about three kinds of monism: first, he calls the materialistic monism; second, the philosophical monism at the intellectual level, and the third, spiritual monism at the level of the spirit.

Swamiji discovered this to be the central, core message of the Upanishads. This idea of Oneness at all levels of existence, as expounded by the Upanishads, always fascinated him. For, he realised, like nobody before him, that the modern age belonged to science and technology, whose unprecedented rise and challenge could be faced only by Upanishadic thought, Vedantic wisdom.

The age that Swamiji saw emerging at that time, later developing through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was the age of critical reason, the age of science and technology, wherein nothing would be taken for granted until passed through the fire of reason. Swamiji could see the fury and power of this age rising fast and said therefore, in his own inimitable style: ‘The sledge-hammer blows of modern science are pulverising the porcelain mass of systems whose foundation is either in faith or in belief or in the majority of votes of church synods’ (4.348–9). He could foresee that religion or philosophy or theology or metaphysics based on doctrines and creeds and dogmas is not going to survive any more as it would fail the test of reason. The modern age needs a scientific and rational basis of philosophy and religion and Swamiji saw that it was only Vedanta, the Upanishadic wisdom that could provide such a basis—that is the Upanishadic idea of Oneness of the Atman and Brahman, the *atma-brahma aikya*, interpreted and understood as meaning oneness at all levels of existence—physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual.

Now, how is it that the Upanishads provide such a rational and scientific basis? Because the whole of the Upanishads is based on investigation and not mere belief. Upanishads or Vedanta is not mere doctrine, it is not a dogma, it is not a creed, it is not metaphysics, it is not even philosophy or religion. It is just clear investigation into the nature of Reality, it is investigation into who

we really are, into what is the core of our being. This investigation is called *jijnasa*, as in *athato brahmajijnasa*, or *athato dharma jijnasa*, that is, ‘Now begins the enquiry into the nature of Brahman, supreme Reality’, or ‘Now begins the enquiry into the nature of dharma’.¹⁸ It is called *jijnasa*, enquiry, and is also called *mimamsa*, as in *purva mimamsa* and *uttara mimamsa* dealing respectively with dharma and moksha. *Mimamsa* means, a conclusive fact of realisation, clear determination at the end of a scientific enquiry.

Insight Two: Religion is Realisation, Hinduism Characterised by 'An Infinite Inclusiveness'

Another cardinal principle that Swamiji was never tired of teaching and which forms the core of his definition of religion is that the Hindu faith is essentially experiential, based on direct realisation—what the Upanishad calls *sakshat, aparokshat*, that is, direct and immediate super-sensory perception of the Truth of super-consciousness.

In an era when psychology was groping with sub-conscious, conscious, and unconscious, it was Swamiji who emphasised that the Indian and Hindu idea of religion is based on super-consciousness, which is dormant, potentially present, waiting to be manifested in all beings. Religion is the struggle to ascend along the inner staircase leading to the realisation of super-consciousness when the ‘potential divinity’ gets fully manifest and a brute passing through purification to become a human, ultimately becomes so completely purified—what is known in technical terms as *shuddha sattvic*, that is, endowed with the purest sattva—that one is transformed into God, realises one’s innate divine Self called Atman.

Religion, thus understood, is purged of its narrow, sectarian, dogmatic taint and becomes

universal and inclusive—is transformed into a ‘science of consciousness’ contradistinguished from the popular notion of religion as ‘doctrinal conformity, ceremonial piety’. Religion sheds its religiosity to become a science of spirituality. Interestingly, the modern youth, particularly in the West, fired by scientific thought and temper, are looking exactly for this kind of religion, which in fact is the science of spirituality. This new wave movement in the West is the question raised by the modern scientifically-minded youth: ‘How to be spiritual but not religious?’

Swamiji anticipated this long ago when he asserted in his inimitable powerful language that under the sledge-hammer blows of modern scientific discoveries, the doctrines of the church will get pulverized like pieces of porcelain. We may do well to quote Nivedita herself who caught this fundamental idea through her insightful mind: ‘The vast *complexus* of systems which made up Hinduism, was in every case based upon the experimental realisation of religion, and characterised by an infinite inclusiveness. The only tests of conformity ever imposed by the priesthood had been social, and while this had resulted in a great rigidity of custom, it implied that to their thinking the mind was eternally free.’¹⁹

Insight Three: Swamiji's Contribution to Solving an Age-Old Dispute Between the Main Schools Of Vedanta

The dispute among the three main schools of Vedanta philosophy is well known, that has unfortunately derailed the very purpose of Vedanta which is to realise oneself as the divine, which Swamiji called, ‘the manifestation of the Divinity within’. This has led to senseless acrimony and ill-will culminating in vituperation of the worst kind snowballing into the production of very many Vedanta texts replete with the

vilest vituperative expletives, like ‘hundred vituperative verses’—*Shata-dushani* of Vedanta Desika, ‘the sweetness of cutting the opponent to pieces’—*Khandana-khanda-khadya* of Sri Harsha, and so on.

This has been going on for decades if not centuries and Vedanta not only lost its orientation and purpose, but India came into the grip of divisive forces that were destroying the basic fabric of peace and harmony so characteristic of Hindu society. It was at this juncture that the prophet of harmony, Sri Ramakrishna, appeared on the scene and through his beloved ‘Noren’, Swami Vivekananda, proclaimed to the world that the various paths leading to the supreme Reality were not contradictory, but complementary. Sister Nivedita’s understanding of this truth, uninitiated into the origin and nuances of the ideological conflict raging over centuries and unfamiliar with its idioms, is indeed remarkable. Her penetrating insight and brilliant intellect purified by penance could at once grasp the immensity and intensity of Swamiji’s reconciliation of the warring schools of Vedanta that saved Vedanta itself from getting lost in the quagmire of self-destructive conflict. She records this insight in *The Master as I Saw Him*, citing an incident that occurred in Madras in 1897 on Swamiji’s return from the West:

It was on his return to India, in January 1897, that the Swami, in philosophic form, made that contribution to the thought of his people, which, it has been said elsewhere, is required by India of all her epoch-makers. Hitherto, the three philosophic systems—of Unism, Dualism, and Modified Unism or Advaita, Dvaita, and Visishtādvaita—had been regarded as offering to the soul, three different ideals of liberation. No attempt had ever before been made to reconcile these schools. On reaching Madras, however, in 1897, Vivekananda boldly claimed that even the utmost realisations of Dualism

and Modified Unism, were but stages on the way to Unism itself; and the final bliss, for all alike, was the mergence in One without a second. It is said that at one of his midday question-classes, a member of his audience asked him why, if this was the truth, it had never before been mentioned by any of the Masters. It was customary to give answers to these questions, first in English, and then in Sanskrit, for the benefit of such scholars present as knew no modern language, and the great gathering was startled, on this occasion, to hear the reply ‘—Because I was born for this, and it was left for me to do!’ (200–1).

Insight Four: Swamiji’s Revolutionary Perception ‘In The Many and The One, The Same Reality’

Swamiji realised that the modern age is an age of intense activity rather than intense thought as the modern person, with much vaunted pride in the glory of technology, would be a victim of restless activity and find little time to ‘stand and stare’. Given this inevitable fact of the modern person’s rajas-predominance, Swamiji wanted to teach a universal doctrine of karma or activity à la Sri Krishna in the Gita elucidating the secret of transforming karma as a potent means of liberation or mukti suited to the modern age. This new brand of karma yoga which subsumes jnana and bhakti as well as integrates yoga into it, was Swamiji’s unique contribution to the spiritual and philosophical thought of the modern age.

Nivedita was not only quick to realise the uniqueness of this new teaching, in fact the new emphasis given by Swamiji to the already existing karma yoga, but could also realise—which appears to be an extraordinary insight—that this new vision of karma yoga was rooted in and emerged as a natural consequence of Sri Ramakrishna’s realisation of what he called *vijnana*

that made him remain stay put most naturally in the state of consciousness called *bhavamukha*, transcending even Advaita, albeit not negating it. This is clear from Nivedita's comparison of Swamiji's karma yoga as 'not divorced from, but expressing jnana and bhakti' with Sri Ramakrishna's saying that God is both with form and without form. This simultaneity of *saguna* and *nirguna* aspects of the supreme Reality, hitherto unthought-of in religious and philosophical history before Sri Ramakrishna, is realised in the state of *bhavamukha* that was Sri Ramakrishna's most natural abode, wherein he stayed put as a *vijnani*, looking upon the world and its beings, both living and non-living, as saturated and enveloped by God, by divine Consciousness that is at the same time both personal and impersonal, relative and absolute, immanent and transcendent.

This was such an extraordinary teaching, a new teaching with new emphasis as Swamiji himself admitted—as I would show in the discussion below on the philosophical underpinnings of this doctrine—that Nivedita could comprehend and grasp through her pure and intuitive insight. It was given to Nivedita to be blessed with the understanding of this insight revealed by Swamiji himself.

In a rare moment of revelation, Swamiji told her of this revolutionary discovery, which Nivedita describes in her *The Master as I Saw Him*:

Years afterwards, in Paris, someone approached him with a question as to the general history of the development of Indian ideas on these subjects. 'Did Buddha teach that the many was real and the ego unreal, while Orthodox Hinduism regards the One as the Real, and the many as unreal?' he was asked. 'Yes,' answered the Swami. 'And what Ramakrishna Paramahansa and I have added to this is that the Many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the same mind at different times and in different attitudes' (19–20).

Nivedita not only quickly realised the deeper significance of this doctrine but could relate it easily with Sri Ramakrishna, poised in *bhavamukha* as he was, when he said that God is both with form and without form. This doctrine of the equal reality of the One and the many emerging naturally from Sri Ramakrishna's *vijnana* realisation, forms the bedrock of the Ramakrishna Order's plan of karma yoga that Swamiji worked out and transmitted to his followers. I may do well to quote from Nivedita's immortal 'Introduction' to *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*:

It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master's' life, for here he becomes the meeting-point, not only of East and West, but also of past and future. If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realisation. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.

This is the realisation which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of Karma, not as divorced from, but as expressing Jnāna and Bhakti. To him, the workshop, the study, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. To him, there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality. All his words, from one point of view, read as a commentary upon this central conviction. 'Art, science, and religion,' he said once, 'are but three different ways of expressing a single truth. But in order to understand this we must have the theory of Advaita.'²⁰

Insight Five: Swamiji's Assertion That Truth Is Universal, Broad as Daylight, Open to All

All the religions of the world have certain secret, esoteric doctrines that are not universally accessible and are kept as secret messages within the narrow bounds of their own faith. On the one hand, even the divine personalities who are sources of universal inspiration are thought to be the monopoly of particular religious creeds and faiths. On the other hand, it is claimed that inspiration ought to be received only from these personalities who are the only saviours of mankind. Swamiji was one religious leader in modern times whose inquiring mind, scientific temper, and daring search for Truth, unbiased and uninhibited, mercilessly blasted the myth of esotericism and secrecy in the quest for the Ultimate, which is what religious pursuit essentially is.

Sister Nivedita, with her Western training coupled with the training in Indian religious ideals imparted to her by Swamiji himself, could quickly understand the implications of this new approach of Swamiji to the traditionally accepted ideal of *adhikaravada*, the criteria of eligibility and competency for receiving knowledge. I quote Nivedita's own words in elaboration of the *raison d'être* of this new approach:

He, indeed, had the generosity to extend to the West, the same gospel that the Indian sages had preached in the past to the Indian people—the doctrine of the Divinity in man, to be realised by faithful service, through whatever forms. The life of externals, with its concentration of interest in sense-impressions, was, according to him, a mere hypnotism, a dream, of no exalted character. And for Western, as for Eastern, the soul's quest was the breaking of this dream, the awakening to a more profound and powerful reality. He was for ever finding new ways to express his belief that all men alike had the same vast potentiality. 'Yes! my own life is guided

by the enthusiasm of a certain great Personality', he said once, 'but what of that? Inspiration was never filtered out to the world through one man!' Again he said, 'It is true that I believe Ramakrishna Paramahamsa to have been inspired. But then I am myself inspired also. And you are inspired. And your disciples will be; and theirs after them; and so on, to the end of time!' And on another occasion, to one who questioned him about the old rule of the teachers, that truth should be taught only to those of proved and tested fitness, he exclaimed impatiently, 'Don't you see that the age for esoteric interpretations is over? For good or for ill, that day is vanished, never to return. Truth, in the future, is to be open to the world!'²¹

Insight Six: 'The Many and The One, the Same Reality'—Its Multi-Dimensional Implications Including Swamiji's Emphasis On Character and Strength

It is well known that Swamiji preached character and strength as hallmarks of spiritual growth, rather than spiritual ecstasy and spiritual visions, which are usually considered milestones of spiritual progress. Nivedita's understanding of this teaching of Swamiji, as a social and practical application of Swamiji's philosophic dictum about the One and the many being the same Reality, is a unique insight rarely matched by any of her own insights that are aplenty. In fact, Swamiji went to the extent of saying that manliness was his new gospel. The emphasis on character and strength, on manliness, may appear simplistic and strange, coming as it does from a spiritual leader of the higher order, but then as Nivedita observes, 'These simple truths may prove after all, to be the very core of the new gospel' (282).

Why is it that Swamiji extols these qualities as forming the core of his own brand of spirituality? Discussing the 'intensity of monasticism' vis-à-vis 'the sacredness and helpfulness of marriage' Swamiji, a strong advocate of the

supreme glory of monastic life, wrote the following last sentence: ‘As you have come to see that the glory of life is chastity, so my eyes also have been opened to the necessity of this great sanctification [of marriage] for the vast majority, in order that a few life-long chaste powers may be produced’ (281). It is to Nivedita’s glory that she could read in this last sentence a ‘wide-ranging significance’ that perhaps Swamiji himself would not have ‘thought of ascribing to it’. Nivedita’s commentary on this sentence shows her remarkable insight:

It was the last sentence in the great philosophy which saw ‘in the Many and the One the same Reality’. If the inviolability of marriage be indeed the school in which a society is made ready for the highest possibilities of the life of solitude and self-control, then the honourable fulfilment of the world’s work is as sacred a means to supreme self-realisation, as worship and prayer. We have here, then, a law which enables us to understand the discouragement of religious ecstasy, by Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and his great preference for character, in his disciples. We understood, too, the inner meaning of Vivekananda’s own constant preaching of strength. The reason is very simple. If ‘the Many and the One be the same Reality, seen by the same mind at different times, and in different attitudes’, then, in three words, Character is Spirituality. ‘Greatness’ really is, as a deep thinker has affirmed, ‘to take the common things of life, and walk truly amongst them; and holiness a great love and much serving’. These simple truths may prove after all, to be the very core of the new gospel. And in endorsement of this possibility, we have the Master’s own words ‘The highest truth is always the simplest’ (281–2).

Insight Seven: Swamiji’s Definition of the Mission of the Ramakrishna Order

One of Swamiji’s favourite themes was harmoniously blending the best elements of the East and the West in order to create a new world

civilisation. When he founded the Ramakrishna Order, he was envisioning the Order to be a vehicle to carry on such a mission. The new ideal of obedience, so central to an organisation, structured as it is on a certain hierarchy, had to be harmoniously blended with the tremendous inner freedom that characterises any monk, a sannyasin worth his name and which appears directly opposed to obedience.

Nivedita, analysing Swamiji’s inner conflict, what she calls the ‘pain of the pioneer’,²² the ‘pain endured by the sculptor of a new ideal’, saw how ‘it was inevitable that he [Swamiji] himself should from time to time go through the anguish of revolt’. How remarkably perceptive Nivedita was in empathetically trying to catch glimpses of Swamiji’s psyche when he was tossed with this conflict of ideals and the pain of harmonious reconciliation of the inner life of utter freedom that is the birthright of a sannyasin with the ideal of obedience that a monastic Order would naturally demand. Swamiji himself once said, addressing the monks of Ramakrishna Order he had just formed, ‘You must be as free as the air, and as obedient as this plant and the dog’.²³ Thus one should harmoniously combine in oneself contradictory ideals. Again, let Nivedita speak of her perception of this amazing ‘inner conflict’:

To a Western mind, it might well seem that nothing in the Swami’s life had been more admirable than this. Long ago, he had defined the mission of the Order of Ramakrishna as that of realizing and exchanging the highest ideals of the East and of the West. And assuredly he here proved his own power to engage in such an undertaking as much by his gift of learning as by that of teaching. But it was inevitable that he himself should from time to time go through the anguish of revolt. The Hindu ideal of the religious life, as a reflection on earth of that of the Great God in the Divine Empyrean—the Unmoving, the Untouched, ‘pure, free, ever the

'Witness'—is so clear and so deeply established that only at great cost to himself could a man carry it into a fresh channel. Has anyone realized the pain endured by the sculptor of a new ideal? The very sensitiveness and delicacy of perception that are necessary to his task, that very moral exaltation which is as the chisel in his hand, are turned on himself in passive moments, to become doubt, and terror of responsibility. What a heaven of ease seems then, to such a soul, even the hardest and sternest of those lives that are understood and authenticated by the imitative moral sense of the crowd! I have noticed in most experiences this consciousness of being woven out of two threads, one that is chosen and another endured. But in this case the common duality took the form of a play upon two different ideals, of which either was highest in its own world, and yet each, to those who believed in its fellow, almost as a crime.²⁴

Conclusion

This article is a feeble attempt to capture Sister Nivedita's understanding of Swamiji, that is but an amplification echoing Swamiji's fascinating variety of ideas, all of which show Nivedita and her Master Swamiji as master composers of the symphony of the 'Music of the Spheres' that only the greatest of sages have the privilege of listening to as emanating from the depths of the Cosmos on the one side and from the deeper recesses of the human heart on the other. Although what I have attempted in this paper is but a faint and sketchy portrayal of Nivedita's understanding of the gigantic personality of Swamiji, even that is an attempt so fulfilling, elevating, and rewarding as it is a meditative exercise on these two great souls, the Master and his divinely gifted disciple.

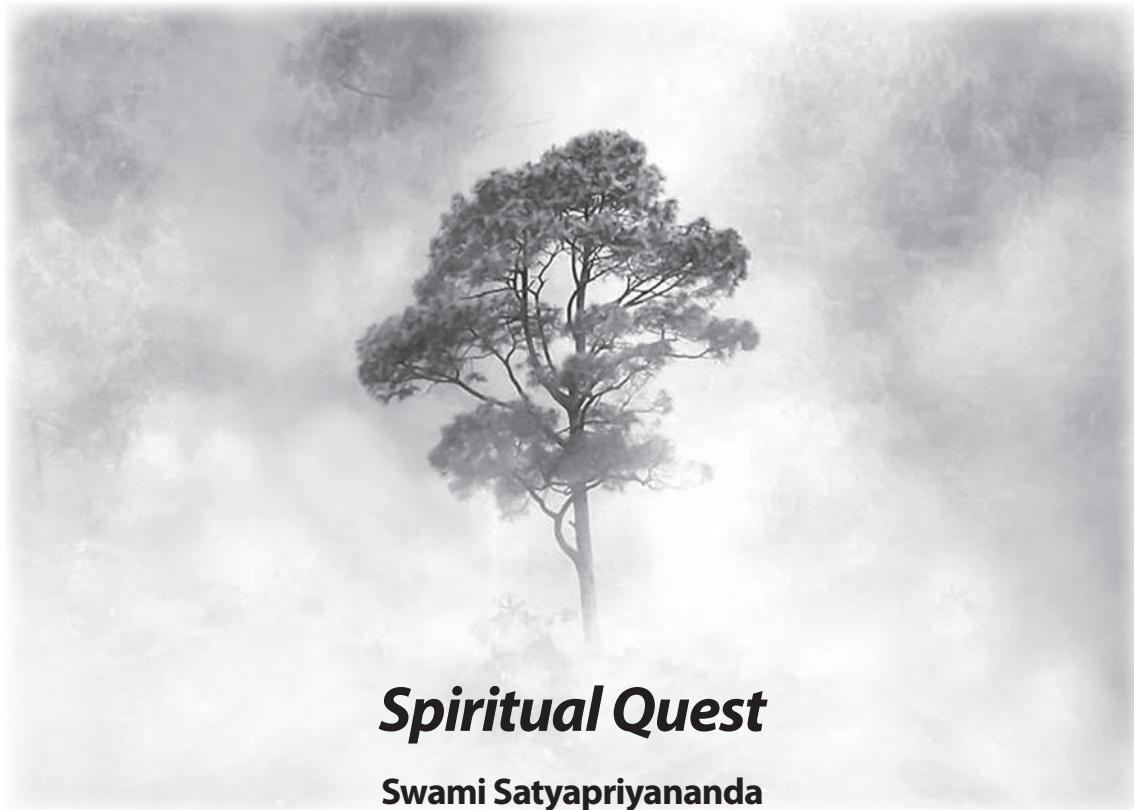
As one wades through the vast literature left behind of Nivedita's life and works, and particularly, *The Master as I Saw Him*, one finds innumerable gems of thought, revealing Nivedita's remarkable mind, luminous and penetrating, that

navigates effortlessly through the turbulent and powerful waves of the ocean of Swamiji's genius with fearless and joyous abandon. Only those who dare to undertake the heroic adventure of accompanying her in this voyage would know its value and the courage it takes to dare to peep into the world of Swamiji's thought—the inner workings of the gigantic mind and heart of this world prophet.



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Spiritual Quest

Swami Satyapriyananda

THE ANCIENT SEERS, mantra-*drashtas*, took quite a bold and logical step in studying the entire universe and used the uniform principle that the effect is the same as the cause in a different form. We know that water is the effect of the combination of hydrogen and oxygen. Therefore, in water we can infer that both hydrogen and oxygen are in a state of combination. By studying water through electrolysis, we can ascertain what the cause contained, namely, hydrogen and oxygen.

The rishis therefore studied the universe as the effect and found that it is differentiated by name and form. This led them to infer that the cause, which was originally undifferentiated, became differentiated by name and form.

Brahman as Different from Name and Form

Having projected the universe, *tat srishtva*, Brahman entered into the bodies of embodied beings *tad eva anupravishat*,¹ ‘up to the very tips of the nails’, as a razor lies hidden in its case, or as fire, which sustains the world, lies hidden in its source, a piece of wood. The word used is ‘hidden’. Brahman is very much there being all-pervading, but it is just hidden from view. When the case is opened, we can see the razor inside; when wood is rubbed with another piece of dry wood, the heat generated thereby causes the wood to burn and we can see that the fire was there in the wood. Similarly, one gets fire sparks by striking two pieces of flint against one another.

Other examples of one thing hiding another are found in the Bhagavadgita: dense smoke covering fire; dust covering mirror; and womb covering the embryo.² Another example is that of a pond covered by moss. So too, ignorance, *ajnana*, covers knowledge, *jnana*; just as the sun is shining bright in the sky but a patch of cloud covers the path of one's vision and hides the sun from view. The small patch of cloud is far too small to cover the sun. So, even when the sun is hidden from our view, it is shining brightly. By personal effort one can fly above the cloud and see the sun; or else a brisk wind can blow away the cloud and the sun gets revealed! The first is the language of the method of knowledge, which depends on personal effort, and the second of the method of devotion, which depends on surrender and grace. In medicine too, we find that even those things that cannot be seen directly with the naked eye can be seen with x-rays or similar penetrating rays.

This Brahman is experienced, *drishyate*, by the sharp and penetrating intellect of those who are adept in seeing the subtle, *tvagrayaya budhyya sukshmaya sukshmadarshibhish*, that is, those whose vision is not gross,³ and this experience becomes firmly grounded by long constant efforts with great love for the end to be attained, *dirgha-kala nairantarya satkara-sevito dridhabhumib*.⁴ Truly, the enquiry after Self even in the method of knowledge is bhakti or love! How else other than intuition and subtle vision does one make scientific discoveries—deep within an atom, or far beyond in the outer space?

Similarly, people do not see the all-pervading Brahman because of its characteristic of being hidden as in the several examples given above; when viewed in parts as associated with a characteristic, it is incomplete and remains hidden. How does that which is self-effulgent and indivisible 'become' hidden and

incomplete? Associated with different functions, it gets different names. For example, (1) when breathing, it is called the vital breath, *prana*; (2) when speaking, the organ of speech; (3) when seeing, the eye; (4) when hearing, the ear; (5) when thinking, the mind, and so on. These are merely its names according to its different functions. 'Yatha soumya ekena mrittipindena sarvam mrinmayam vijnatam syat, vacharambhanam vikaro namadheyam, mrittika ityeva satyam'; even as by knowing a piece of mud, all objects made of mud are known, thus all modifications of mud are caused out of word and thereby mere names alone; mud alone is real!⁵ So too one can think of all ornaments made of gold or all gadgets made of steel.

One who meditates on one or the other of its functional aspects, does not know it in its entirety, for it is then incomplete. Brahman is 'separated from its totality' by being associated with a single characteristic function. So, Brahman is not any one of the several associated forms or names, nor all of them, on account of transcending all functions and forms or names, and being the very foundation of all these. Thus, we say that it is beyond mind and speech, *vakya-mana-atita*; yet it, being Consciousness, is the very foundation of mind and speech, *vakya-mana-adhara*. Just as many electrical appliances function when they receive the supply of electricity, even so everything in the universe functions because of the underlying Consciousness. The appliances by themselves cannot function; nor can electricity function by itself without the appliance having the requisite hardware.

We have the familiar example of blind people seeing an elephant. The blind touched different parts of the same elephant and came to different conclusions about what the animal in their presence was! They said: it is a very big

fan; it is a huge wall; no, it is a stout rope; or it is a huge pillar. Thus, each statement is incorrect, for the elephant is none of these differing perceptions nor a sum of these perceptions; it is what it is. Sri Ramakrishna taking the example of ghee said, that the question how ghee tastes can be answered by only saying, ‘ghee is what ghee tastes like’.⁶ This is true of the Self when viewed through the various sheaths: *annamaya kosha*, sheath of physical body; *pranamaya kosha*, sheath of vital force; *manomaya kosha*, sheath of the mind; *vijnanamaya kosha*, sheath of intelligence; and *anandamaya kosha*, sheath of bliss. In these five *koshas*, sheaths, grouped into three bodies—*sthula*, gross; *sukshma*, subtle; and *karana*, causal—spanning the three periods of time—past, present, and future—and spanning the three states of existence—waking, sleep, and deep sleep; Atman, the *vyashti abhipraya* or individualised perception, of Brahman, which is the *samashti abhipraya* or collective perception, is hidden by *ajnana*, ignorance.

Brahman is not undergoing any of the processes of creation, preservation, or destruction, though the Upanishads themselves say: ‘*Yato va imani bhutani jayante*, that from which all these beings arise; *yena jatani jivanti*, that by which all beings live; and, *yat prayanti abhisamvishanti*, that unto which they return upon destruction; *tat vijijnasasva tat brahmeti*, know that to be Brahman.’⁷ The projected, changing world is an unreal superimposition on the only real substratum called Brahman. It is like a dream and is real only so long as the dream lasts. Once the dream breaks and one wakes up, that is the end of the dream state and of the dreams we see. So too when our dreams about our waking state ends upon realisation of the ultimate Truth, only Consciousness exists. It is to be noted that even though the projection is unreal, it rests on the

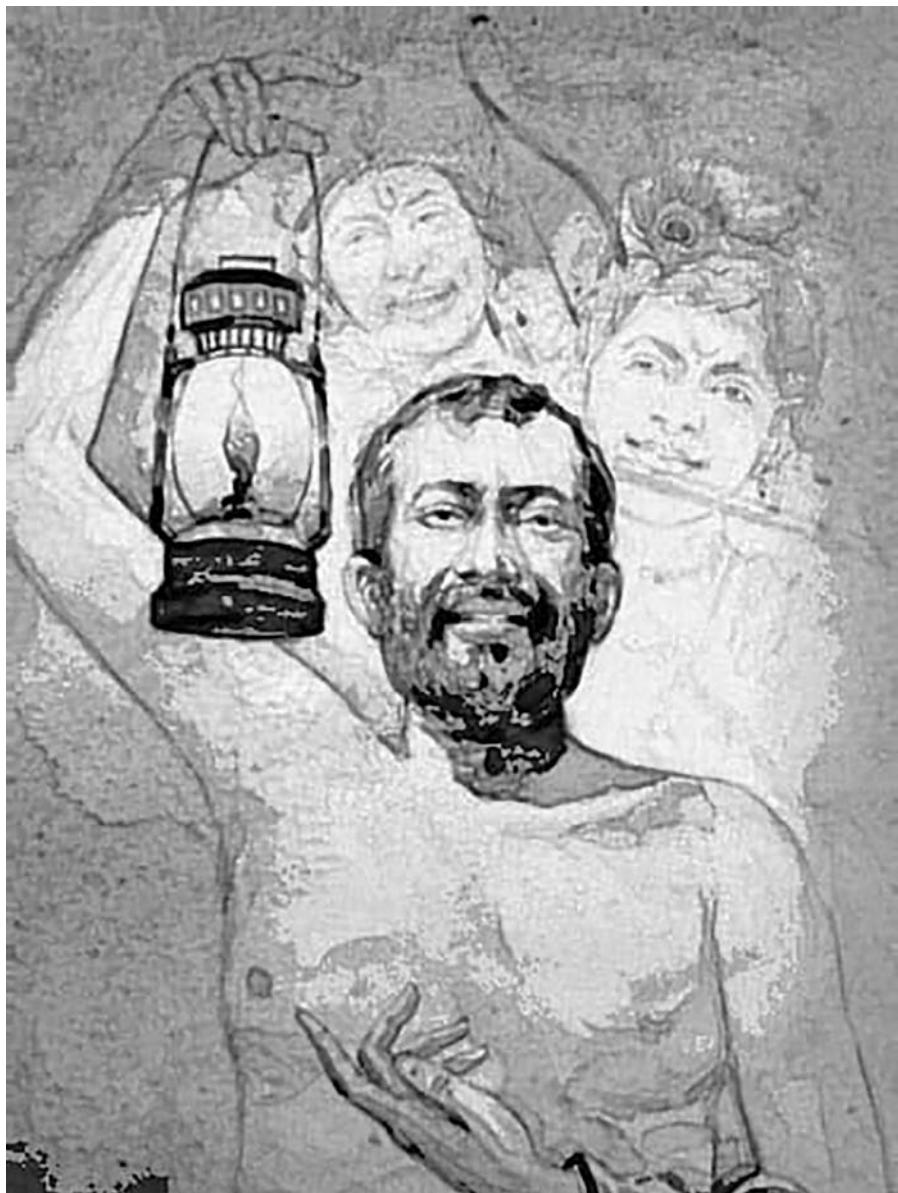
real ultimate Truth, Brahman. However, Brahman does not require any other foundation to rest upon: it rests upon its own splendour, *svamahimne pratishthita*.

The Method of Knowledge

Brahman alone is to be meditated upon, not as associated with any single characteristic function—for, in it, being the very foundation, all these different characteristic functions become unified. The ear hears, no doubt; but the Self is the ear of the ear, and so on.⁸ Of all these, this Self alone should be known, for one knows all these different characteristics through it. If one sees the footprint—stands for Brahman—one knows the animal—Brahman associated with some characteristics—the footprint corresponds to—a deer or a cow or some other thing.

If one knows Brahman by meditation on Brahman alone, then one can know Brahman—prana, speech, eye, ear, mind, and so on—which are but different names associated with its different characteristic functions—breathing, speaking, seeing, hearing, thinking, and so on. Thus, in reply to the question, ‘Knowing what can all this universe be known?’, is the idea that by knowing one thing, Brahman or the Self, the underlying Consciousness, everything else is known in and through it.⁹ There is no end to acquiring the knowledge of the multiplicity of things in the universe for these are only names and forms, an unreal superimposition, serving a specific purpose.

One may give any number of forms to gold or clay or steel but the essence of all these forms is the substance, namely, gold or clay or steel as the case may be. No form exists separate from the substance; one cannot separate the form of a necklace from the gold of which it is made! Further, the necklace, the crown, the ring, the amulet, all serve different purposes. One lights a clay



lamp and fills a clay pot with water. Imagine the foolishness of the person who fills the pot with oil and lights a wick or of the person who keeps a few spoons of water in the lamp to get cool water to alleviate thirst in summer!

The clay mouse and the clay elephant are both made of clay, no doubt; however, the mouse and elephant are different. A king and a soldier are far different; but the same king

without the kingdom and the soldier without his weapons and shield are both human beings. Hence a wise person should strive to know Brahman alone that removes all sorrow.¹⁰ Sri Ramakrishna also points out that to know God is knowledge and not to know him is ignorance.¹¹ Thus our present-day approach at acquiring knowledge keeps us in ignorance about Brahman, our very foundation, the only thing to be known in human life. How badly we are using this rare gift of human birth for career building! And we glorify worldly knowledge as something basic for human existence, and generations after generations have been following this approach like a bunch of sheep following one another!

How to 'Unhide' the Hidden Brahman

We have observed earlier that Brahman is hidden by being associated with certain characteristics; these characteristics are all action-oriented such as thinking, seeing, and so on, which result in many names and forms, and serve different purposes, which is the nature of this world, samsara, characterised by the cycle of birth and death.

Consider a huge ocean, infinite in depth, infinite in extent, without eddies or boundaries, homogeneous; this is one way of symbolising Self or Brahman. The vast sky and the effulgent sun

are some of the other commonly used illustrations. Upon the self-same ocean are waves, small and large, whirlpools, bubbles, froth, and so on, arising from the same ocean, moving about on the surface, clashing against one another, raising high decibel sounds, and again getting submerged in the ocean. This is the world of name-form-purpose which has Brahman, the ocean, for its basis.

Brahman is the One whole, the One without a second alike it or different from it; self-effulgent, all-pervading, without the touch of any type of work; Consciousness per se without the need for another to be conscious of; permanent, without any decay, itself the support of itself without needing anything else to support it; the world is diametrically opposite! It is a world of multiplicity, shining in the effulgence of the light of Brahman reflected on inert Nature, finite with boundaries, ever active where 'one cannot remain without work for even a moment',¹² conscious of other objects with this consciousness founded on the pure Consciousness of Brahman, evanescent, decaying, resting on Brahman as its support. In the latter, samsara, Brahman remains hidden just as a snake perceived on a rope hides the underlying rope and frightens the seer. Where the snake is seen, there the rope exists as the underlying reality. It is not that the rope is in one place and the superimposed snake is elsewhere. So, it is customary to hold that this world, considered unreal, also is Brahman, the real existence.

There are ways open to us for uncovering that which is hidden:

i. Meditation is the answer given by the persons of knowledge for this uncovering. But it is a single monotonous note played on an instrument that is capable of setting several notes into a melodious music. Further, there is the question of competence of the aspirant for following the

path of knowledge, which is very restrictive and excludes the vast majority. The persons of knowledge dive deep below the surface of the ocean and enter the calm depths of the ocean and identify themselves with Brahman by meditating on one of several *mahavakyas*, great sayings. Though four *mahavakyas* are popular, many others are oft-quoted, for the Upanishads, focussing on the identity of Atman and Brahman, have exhausted the Sanskrit vocabulary as it were to throw up several such *mahavakyas*! Indeed, many Upanishadic utterances keep this identity in view, the revelation of this identity, which is very fruitful, not knowable by any other means, being the sole purpose of the Upanishads.

'Atma va arey drashtavyah, shrotavyah, mantavyah, nididhyasitavyah; this Self or Atman is to be seen, to be heard, to be reflected upon, and to be meditated upon.'¹³ Though the meaning of the words, '*Aham brahma asmi*; I am Brahman', one of the *mahavakyas*, is not true in the literal sense, we have to interpret them in the implied sense, which is as follows: I or *jiva*, the embodied being, bereft of its attribute, *ajnana* or ignorance, implies Atman or the Self; Brahman as *ishvara*, without its attribute or maya, is Brahman. Thus the implied meaning is that the Self is Brahman. The practice of the persons of knowledge is to meditate on this concept of identity of Atman and Brahman, without letting the mind wander to worldly objects.

This thought on Brahman, *brahmakara vritti* or *sadvritti*, is used to attenuate the thought on non-Brahman, *anatma vritti* or *asadadvritti*. *Brahmakara vritti* itself is called mukti or liberation, by some. Though one eliminates the sense of ego associated with the body, child, spouse, property, one has to be extremely careful and see that the sense of ego does not raise its ugly head through the stirring of the latent tendencies, by meditation—thinking internally—on

the sense-objects and related action outside. The case is just the same as that of a lemon tree considered to be dead, which puts forth its leaves when it receives a few sprinklings of rain. Hence, carelessness, *pramada*, is equated with death. The Gita warns that the senses are extremely turbulent and drag away forcibly even the mind of a wise person striving very hard to control the senses.¹⁴

The next wonderful idea is that this Self, which is hidden, is dearer than a son, dearer than wealth, dearer than everything else, because it is the innermost. And so, one should meditate upon the Self alone as dear. One who meditates upon the Self alone as dear—whatever one holds dear will not perish, for the Self is not perishable; it is immortal. So persons of knowledge meditate on the Self alone and understand that behind all worldly love is the love for the Self.

What is the corollary? If anything or anyone is dear to a person, certainly it is so because there is the Self in that, albeit hidden. There is no dearth of things and people on which one showers love. It is true that the Self is all-pervading, that we suffer because we lack this perception that these are all nothing but the Self, and come to grief seeing them perish before our very eyes. The Upanishads say: ‘*Tatra ko mohah, kah shokah, ekatvam anupashyatah*; where can there be delusion or grief when one has unitary vision?’¹⁵ 2. The devotees look upon this world of name-form-purpose not as unreal superimposition, but as the manifestation of the glory of Brahman by its power Shakti, which is non-different from Brahman. Brahman and Shakti are identical. Reality that is eternal has two modes of expression, changeless and with change. Both changing and unchanging belong to the same Reality, said Sri Ramakrishna. So, even swimming on the surface amidst waves, persons of devotion try to perceive the play of Shakti, in and through the

immense Consciousness of Brahman. The waves, whirlpools, bubbles, froth, and the ocean below are the same water; the difference is that the surface phenomena have far more glory attached to it, divine power of *ishvara*, God.

Sri Ramakrishna observes that the stairs are made up of the same material as the roof, an observation made by persons of knowledge after discarding the stairs as not being the roof and climbing to the roof. They too say that the world is only Brahman.

He further points out that people belonging to different language systems call the same thing as water, aqua, *pani*, or *jal*. Taken out of the language context, they are all the same. So too, he says that people refer to a chameleon as possessed of different colours and come to blows failing to recognise that a chameleon is capable of changing its colour to correspond to the background to protect itself and sometimes is even without any colour; whatever the colour or be it of no colour even, it is the same chameleon. The ancient Vedas declared: ‘*Ekam sat, viprah bahudha vadanti*; truth is one; sages call it variously.’¹⁶ Sri Ramakrishna asks whether the stars seen at night vanish during the day? God can be worshipped in images; can God not be worshipped in all existence? God can be seen in meditation with eyes closed; can God not be seen with eyes wide open? Thus, the world is not the thing that causes the problem; it is the perceiving mind which sees the difference between a daughter, a sister, a wife, and a mother, and exhibits love towards them in different ways.

It is with this intuitive perception that even a devotee can ‘see’ what is stated to be ‘*Nityo'nityanam, chetanah-chetananam, eko bahunam*; eternal among things non-eternal, Consciousness in things endowed with consciousness, the One in the midst of multiplicity’¹⁷ It is otherwise futile to even think that in this world

where even a child knows that everything is evanescent, there could be anything eternal to look for. Even so, beings are conscious of each other and they fail to see that the pure Consciousness is the foundation for the relative consciousness of various objects.

The multiplicity we see all around us is due to our seeing differences and the consequent classification of things into various classes and subclasses; once we surmount the differences and see the underlying unity then we shall be able to appreciate the unitary existence of what we see outside and consider them as various glorious manifestations. Differences are of three types: *vijatiya*, between things of different categories, as between wealth, material substance, and a miser, living being; *svajatiya* as between different types of the same category—different fruits like lemon, mango, apple, and so on; and *svagata* as between components of a particular thing—root, trunk, branch, leaves, fruits, and so on—of the same tree.

The path of devotion does not have rigorous constraints for eligibility like the path of knowledge. In it the devotee treads the path of love for God and ultimately reaches the God of Love. There are several deities one can choose from. There are several levels of proximity one can attain with God even up to identity with God, which a devotee does not want; the devotee prefers to taste sugar and not to become sugar. A devotee enjoys several types of relationships with one's chosen deity and observes a large variety of devotional practices. This is the luxurious beauty and abundance of the path of devotion. The devotee interprets the Upanishadic statement: '*Ishavasyam idam sarvam yat kincha jagatyam jagat*' as 'Cover everything, moving and unmoving, with the face of God'.¹⁸ They also take recourse to the statement of Sri Krishna, 'I reside in the hearts of all beings', and 'I am

situated in the region of the heart of all beings, O Arjuna; all beings whirl around by my maya, as if mounted on a machine'.¹⁹ Thus, they look upon all existence as so many pointers to the divine within. It is like a room inlaid with several pieces of mirrors and an object placed in the middle; in whichever direction one sees that object is seen!

In Sri Ramakrishna's literature one gets the example of looking upon Baby Krishna in one's nephew or of God in the sheep one is tending with love. What is the great change one sees? Instead of saying that Brahman is hidden because of its apparent association with external characteristics, one says that in whichever direction one's eyes go, one only meets the chosen deity. Be it the ocean or the waves or bubbles or whirlpools or froth, it is all water. This is the position of the Vedantin also. Brahman is no more hidden; it is immanent in Nature and self-revealed by meditating on all objects and people as the seat of the chosen deity, and is not caught up in name-form-purpose net.

The path of devotion has a parallel to the *maha-vakyas* or great sayings of the path of knowledge. It is the mantra, which means, '*Mananat trayate iti mantrah*'; that mystic formula which takes one across the ocean of samsara, characterised by birth and death'. By repetition with an understanding of the meaning of the mantra, '*Tat japhah tad-artha-bhavanam*', as stated in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*,²⁰ everything in this world is the manifestation of the glory of Brahman, symbolised by a seed word, by its Shakti, symbolised by another seed word, which is non-different from it. The waves, whirlpools, bubbles, spray—are all various forms with their respective names. Of these, there are some gigantic tidal waves of immense spiritual strength, referred to as incarnations of God, and many other inferior manifestations, the embodied beings, which filled with immense humility, surrender themselves to

the incarnation. This is the central idea behind the repetition of the mystic formula with contemplation of the meaning.

What is the nature of this surrender? Just as a pen and paper are not sufficient to write an article, just as paint, brush, and canvas are not enough to draw a portrait without one taking up the pen or brush; even so we are incapable of performing any action without God performing the action through us. Devotees hold that God is the doer, in whose hands we are merely instruments. In and through every action, the devotee sees the tangible presence of one's chosen deity. It is because of grace that God makes different people the instruments for getting God's work accomplished. So, the devotee surrenders oneself to that tidal wave of spirituality, the incarnation, conceived as the highest among the glorious manifestations of Brahman by its power, Shakti. This attitude is strengthened by the repetition of the mantra and contemplating on its meaning. This is the meditation of the devotee. God commits to provide yoga, union with whatever one may have need of and *kshema*, protection of whatever one has. God also grants fearlessness and freedom from worry regarding merit or demerit accruing from actions as their fruits, by the very fact that all actions are performed by God alone and one is merely an instrument. Can a mere instrument ever justify the claim to the fruits of one's actions?

Devotees love the entire world seeing in it the chosen deity. Though persons of different castes perform different activities, they are all effective means for attaining perfection if the attitude behind the performance of works is devotional: '*Yataḥ pravrittir bhutanam, yena sarvam idam tatam; svakarmana tam abhyarchya, siddhim vindati manavah;*' that from which all beings originate, that by which everything is permeated, by worshipping that through the performance

of actions, one attains perfection.²¹ In simple terms, in the language of the devotees, the idea translates to *shiva-jnane jiva-seva*, service to embodied beings in the spirit of worship of God.

Thus we should have a detached attachment; detachment to things and people as endowed with name and form or *tyaga*; and attainment of immortality through attachment to the Self or Divine within. Both the person of knowledge and the person of devotion should look within; the former withdrawing oneself diligently from the sensory world of name and form outside and the latter trying always to direct one's attention to the divine deity within all existence. Together, these two approaches, knowledge and devotion, enliven one's spiritual life by being complementary to each other: meditate on the transcendent Self within and serve the immanent Divinity pervading all existence.



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15. *Isha Upanishad*, 7.
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The Courage to be Human

Swami Kritarthananda

Existential Force

MOM, WHAT IS COURAGE?'—A five-year-old boy once asked his mother. His mother could not find out an immediate satisfactory answer for the child. That evening, when the mother took her child for an outing at the countryside, they happened to pass by a place where a devastating conflagration had destroyed the whole forest just the night before. There, amidst the charred debris, they saw

a beautiful wild red flower raising its head, as if to pronounce proudly the existence of life by smiling at all signs of death. The mother's face lit up. She drew her son's attention to that brave little flower and said: 'There, my son, that is what is called courage. A wild little flower standing bravely in the valley of death.'

This story at once reminds us of the unique definition of life given impromptu by Swami Vivekananda to the Maharaja of Khetri: 'Life

is the unfoldment and development of a being under circumstances tending to press it down.¹ Indeed, life is a sign of great courage to grow amidst all adversities. The external nature challenges our existence every moment and the soul forges ahead courageously amidst the darkening gloom. Courage is life; fear is death. As long as we are afraid of the world, we are more dead than alive. The famous neurologist, Dr Kurt Goldstein (1878–1965), has defined courage as ‘nothing but an affirmative answer to the shocks of our existence, which must be borne for the actualization of one’s own nature’.² From the above definitions it is clear that courage is closely linked to our being, or existence. The Sanskrit word for existence is *satta*. The essential nature of the Atman is existence-knowledge-bliss, *sat-chit-ananda*. Hence courage is the force needed to defend one’s existence, which is an essence of the soul.

Courage finds expression in an infinite number of ways in our day-to-day life. Wher-
ever there is lack of courage, life ceases to be
worth the name. It is no better than mere veg-
etation. At present we are living in an era of au-
tomaton conformity to the majority or group.
The idea of conformity has dissipated so much
into our being that we never feel to question its
validity. But at the same time we feel the prick
of conformity to a group or majority. When
this conformity is related to an overt author-
ity, we express our pent up feelings against
that authority through rebellion or violence.
But the case becomes tough when the author-
ity demanding our conformity is a covert one,
namely, society, market, ‘common sense’, public
opinion, economic necessities, and so on. One
cannot crusade against an anonymous author-
ity. Under the spell of this anonymous author-
ity one has to present oneself in a way approved
by the group. Hence such conformity gives rise

to existential problems like anxiety, loneliness, boredom, depression, ennui, and so on. Just as fever, cold, and so on, are the indications of a fight going on in the castle of the body between its ever-aware autoimmune system and external agents like bacteria, germs, viruses, and the like, so also are the expressions of anxiety and the like, indications of threat to our existence. Thus it is that the very opposite of courage is not cowardice but conformity of an automaton. In the present age, the human being has made itself an automaton by trying desperately to conform to a group or society. Courage is the only remedy for all the existential problems mentioned above. That is why Swamiji was so intent on ingraining the spirit of courage into the masses. Without courage our very existence becomes meaningless. Hence courage may fittingly be termed as the saving challenge of life.

Two Fields of Expression

Courage being an existential challenge, there are innumerable fields of its manifestation. Wher-
ever there is life, there is courage. Some call
it a struggle of the conscious over the uncon-
scious, while others call it a struggle between
the soul and the matter; again, at other places it
is a struggle between good and evil, higher and
lower values, and so on. Broadly speaking, there
are two fields in which courage finds expression:
secular or the worldly level and the spiritual or
mystic level.

Secular Level

Courage in the secular level finds expression in several ways. One is momentary courage. Obvi-
ously, this type of courage is called for at times
of emergency. For example, saving others from
fire, from imminent accident or danger, from
the hands of hooligans, and so on. Swamiji in his
teens once saved a boy from being run over by a

horse carriage, risking his own life. The *Readers Digest* records many such sagas of people saving others from inevitable death by a hair's breadth. Sometimes the rescuer loses her or his life in the attempt. Such heroic tales are written in golden letters on the pages of history.

Then there are various aerobatics and acrobatic displays of courage, of walking over hot charcoal, funambulism or tightrope walking, circus techniques, equestrian skills, skydiving, surf-riding, and scores of other sensational shows of courage and heroism. Though taken mostly as pastimes, these need, beside intense concentration, persistence, perseverance, and an indomitable courage to succeed and overcome fear.

The third type of courage lies in our day-to-day living. Every day we come across so many people and work with them. No two of them are of the same nature. The husband and wife have to live and work together with a common interest. Naturally there arise differences of opinion, irksome feeling, domination, misunderstanding, intolerance, fault-finding, and many others. Indeed, it needs extraordinary courage and mental strength to forge a bright future out of bleak, adverse surroundings. To tolerate others with all their ferocity and shortcomings, one needs courage. To forgive and forget the lapses of others, one needs heroic strength. Above all, a person needs a stoic forbearance to live peacefully with others, which is another example of courage. When the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi said in her parting advice, 'If you want peace ... don't find faults with others, but find fault rather with yourself',³ she actually put before posterity a huge responsibility of practising a heroic courage in eking out a happy living amidst the unavoidable hardships of life.

The fourth type of courage is that of a soldier during a war. The soldier must be ready to go to

the mouth of a cannon in the midst of a fusillade, jump into the fire whenever ordered to do so. Such acts call for an inhuman desperation, a devil's daring. The soldiers leave behind no tale to tell. Except a handful of close mates, very few people come to know of the heroism and chivalry displayed by a soldier who dies on the battlefield. They serve the country through their courage and die a martyr's death. Swamiji highly eulogised the attitude of a soldier and wanted to ingrain that spirit into the lives of each and every monk of the Ramakrishna Order. If one wants to learn something about courage, one has to sit at the feet of such people who possess such spirit of daredevilry.

The fifth kind of courageous act lies in the lives of the physically challenged persons. They do not just passively accept the disability or dysfunction of their organ; they work hammer and tongs to make for the loss they have incurred by a decree of fate. And it is a strange phenomenon of nature that it compensates for the defect in one limb by raising the capacity in some other respect in that person. The visually challenged, for instance, are seen to develop some extrasensory nerves that an ordinary person lacks. The legendary personality of Helen Keller speaks volumes in this respect. As everyone knows, she was handicapped, not in one, but in several respects. Still, her success in life was phenomenal. She knew every inch of the path of struggle ahead of her. The only capital she had was an indomitable courage, an unflagging zeal, and to top it all, an unwavering faith in God. A few words from her bear mention in this context:

When it seems that our sorrow is too great to be borne, let us think of the great family of the heavy-hearted into which our grief has given us entrance, and inevitably, we feel about us their arms, their sympathy, their understanding. ... Believe, when you are most unhappy, that there



Helen Keller Holding A Magnolia (c. 1920)

is something for you to do in the world. So long as you can sweeten another's pain, life is not in vain.⁴ ...

Robbed of joy, of courage, of the very desire to live, the newly-bereaved frequently avoids companionship, feeling himself so limp with misery and so empty of vitality that he is ill suited for human contacts. And yet no one is so bereaved, so miserable, that he cannot find someone else to succour, someone who needs friendship, understanding, and courage more than he (31). ...

Often when the heart is torn with sorrow, spiritually we wander like a traveller lost in a deep wood. We grow frightened, lose all sense

of direction, batter ourselves against trees and rocks in our attempt to find a path. All the while there is a path—a path of Faith—that leads straight out of the dense tangle of our difficulties into the open road we are seeking (37).

Keller also says: 'I thank God for my handicaps, for, through them, I have found myself, my work, and my God.'⁵

Another kind of courage consists in taking up responsibility for one's own deeds. However simple it may seem, it is difficult to practise. People display courage to do everything under the sun, as if they can bring everything under their control. But behind the facade of desperation, most people nurture a coward's attitude towards life. That is why in most cases it is found that people take up huge enterprises to do something 'big'; but the moment a little jolt from the world comes by way of failure, frustration, or hopelessness, they are nowhere to be found. The brave person is one who takes in one's stride many a failure, frustration, and challenge of life and stays unmoved in one's endeavour. A popular Sanskrit verse says in a lighter vein that

people hanker for the result of their good actions but refrain from doing good; while they do not crave for the bad results; still they go on doing evil deeds willingly.⁶ This is nothing but a sign of cowardice, that is, passing on the buck to others. One who is really brave will say forever, 'The buck stops here', not in a pessimistic sense but with a spirit of acceptance of one's capacities as well as limitations, with an air of equanimity in success and failure. The word 'equanimity' traces its root in the Latin word 'æquanimitas', meaning equal, æqua, mind, spirit, or feeling, animitas. The courageous person learns to acquire the strength of a calm patience to accept the trials of life.

This, again, is one of the striking features of monastic life. A monastic does not have to take any vow except this one. The monastic is supposed to renounce everything including one's ego. The only exception is one taking this one vow, namely, of shouldering the responsibility for one's actions. As opposed to the general trend one never holds others responsible for one's fate; rather one says, as Swamiji has pointed out: 'Peace to all: From me no danger be / To aught that lives. In those that dwell on high. / In those that lowly creep, I am the Self in all!'⁷ This poem is deeply significant. One should not hold others responsible for all the mishaps in one's life, much less inflict injury to others for all the wrongs done by them. Swamiji has inculcated this profound idea in the heart of posterity. In one of his lectures he exhorted in a clear strain:

Therefore, blame none for your own faults, stand upon your own feet, and take the whole responsibility upon yourselves. Say, 'This misery that I am suffering is of my own doing, and that very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone.' That which I created, I can demolish; that which is created by some one else I shall never be able to destroy. Therefore, stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is within yourselves. Therefore, make your own future. 'Let the dead past bury its dead' (2.225).

Spiritual Level

In the spiritual context also, courage manifests in a great many number of ways. We shall discuss only a few among them here. Spiritual life is a life of freedom from compulsion, influence, or bondage. It is a way of affirming our identity with the Divine. One can establish this identity in various ways—by negating or ignoring all

pulls of the world and the flesh, by being aware of oneself every moment of life, by rediscovering the static element amidst all dynamism, or by seeing the eternal cosmic dance behind the apparently static condition of the universe. If secular life has tension, anxiety, frustration, depression, and the like, as its thorns, spiritual life has discontent, inner struggle, forbearance, patience, and the like as its crossroads, U-turns, and speed bumps. Strictly speaking, the paths of secular and spiritual life are not two different highways. They are not even parallels. They are two phases of one and the same path. Nay, more, the secular path ultimately merges into the spiritual. Depending on the mental state and attitude of the aspirant, the function of courage in spiritual context varies.

The first is the courage to seek the Divine. The external world is so attractive with its glitters that the senses naturally rush towards them. The *Katha Upanishad* made a unique statement befitting the context: 'The Self-Existent One [Divine] has made the senses outgoing, defective. Thus it is that people do not see the indwelling Spirit. However, there are some courageous people who dare to see the Self by shutting down their senses through will power and directing them inwards. They seek immortality.'⁸

The whole world is crazy after achieving the petty ends of life. People run after ambition, name and fame, wealth, prosperity, and what not. It is rightly pointed out to be a frantic steeplechase after nothing. At long last, people discover to their utter chagrin and dismay that they are left back to square one without making an inch of progress. All their mad pursuits have been futile. This is really an unsettling situation. Yet people do not hesitate to scoff at those rare souls who dare to hold on to the Divine under all trying circumstances.

Seeking a Divine being whom we cannot

see, and holding fast to that being through all the trials and fiery ordeals of life in the midst of the glamour of this world is not an easy task. It needs superhuman courage and one-pointed will to live in the tune of the Divine with unwavering enthusiasm for years, perhaps for births together. Faith and hope are the two weapons to win the battle. Of course, character is another weapon. How to judge the character of a person? Swamiji pointed it out in one of his lectures on karma yoga:

If you really want to judge of the character of a man, look not at his great performances. Every fool may become a hero at one time or another. Watch a man do his most common actions; those are indeed the things which will tell you the real character of a great man. Great occasions rouse even the lowest of human beings to some kind of greatness, but he alone is the really great man whose character is great always, the same wherever he be (1.29).

This clearly means that the person of character can convert the most commonplace work into the worship of the Divine. For such a person the line of demarcation between the sacred and secular disappears.

The next in line is the courage to preserve inner freedom. The world we live in has a tendency to bind everyone to its Procrustean bed of obligations, duties, social norms, and mores, and even beliefs of the majority. Outwardly we cry hoarse on freedom of choice, civil rights, and many other such rights. But whenever any individual gathers up courage to maintain inner freedom, the majority is seen to antagonise such a person.

The common run of people has a nature of crabs. The vendors take the crabs to the market in a huge open basket without any risk. Any crab trying to crawl out of the basket would be held back by another. In society, too, when a

member evinces extraordinary talent, the first tendency of the rest of the members would be to drag such person down to the level of the common people.

Let us take a living example from the pages of history. When Galileo proclaimed the truth that not the sun but it is the earth that moves round the sun, he was asked to recant his view, which went against the extant belief of the people. Galileo had no options left but to make an outward compromise by withdrawing his conclusion based on scientific experiment. But legend has it that in an aside he said, 'It still does move round the sun.' As a result of his showy confession Galileo was allowed to carry on with his research work. One may look askance at his lack of courage to hold on to the truth.

But one point should not be lost sight of in this context. It needs greater courage to preserve one's inner freedom than clamour for outer freedom. Rashness is quite different from courage. Galileo had to make a compromise in order to proceed undeterred in the inner realms of spiritual life. From his standpoint, it was meaningless to raise a hue and cry on maintaining outer freedom. Moreover, he was confident that the truth would establish itself in the long run.

The third function is the courage to develop self-awareness. One who desires to go within the recess of the heart must convert his life into a conscious flow of energy. Strange as it may sound, most of our actions in daily life are just an unconscious flow of the life-force. We claim that we are aware of everything we do, while in truth we are being led helplessly by the impetuosity of work. Work controls us, we do not control it. This is the verdict of the Bhagavadgita. In the third chapter the Lord says: 'All are forced to work helplessly by qualities born of nature.' In order to develop self-awareness, the first step is to do all work without any compulsion from

external authority. Non-compulsive, self-directed work leads to develop self-awareness in us. Swamiji said: 'Everything that you do under compulsion goes to build up attachment.'¹⁰

But in doing so, one may incur the displeasure of the authority under which one has to work. What, then, is the way out? The solution is simple. As regards obligatory, or even occasional duties, one cannot but obey the authority. Of course, illegal or forbidden works are excluded from this list. The primers on Vedantic texts prescribe four kinds of work, namely, obligatory, *nitya*; occasional, *naimittika*; desirable, *kamya*; and forbidden, *nishiddha*. Of these, the first type of work must be carried out regularly, even if in a casual way. For, refraining from it might give rise to adverse effects, just as the daily habits of eating, drinking, sleeping, and the like, must be carried out if we want to keep the doctor away from our doors. Yet, even amidst our busy schedule of daily chores, it is possible to keep some time apart for our private practice of creative, self-directed work. As opposed to all other unconscious drives, this type of work never tires us; instead it restores our energy and enthusiasm, and in addition we rediscover ourselves with our creative skills. Again, by doing all works with a spirit of worship also, one can bring self-awareness even into the daily menial chores like sweeping, mopping, cooking, and others. No authority under the sun has the power to change the attitude of a person towards the objective world unless one oneself does it.

The fourth type of courage lies in pursuing spiritual life. Many of us do lead spiritual lives. Hordes of people go to temples, churches, mosques, and other holy places; pilgrim centres thrive with the money donated by such religious people. Then, people make a lot of charities with a view to expiating their sins; they engage in congregational services, masses, group devotional

songs; they offer oblations in sacrificial rites, and so forth. Obviously these feats do not need any courage. Then where lies the courage to pursue spiritual life?

To get the answer, we have to be keen observers. It is a strange anomaly that religious people of the abovementioned kind praise God for all their success only when things go well with them; but when the case is contrary, that is, when they fall into hard times, more often than not, the faith of such people vanishes into thin air. This happens because, as Ramana Maharshi has aptly pointed out, our idea of grace is success insured. We forget that God's grace also lies in our self-effort to brave all the adversities and ordeals of life. God's grace is there when the honest person has to bear the evil consequences of one's honesty. A truly spiritual person never cares to blame God for all one's failures. Such a person has deep, unshakeable faith in God's power to protect one under all circumstances. One does not care even for 'spiritual visions' or miracles. Does it not need a Herculean courage to linger to an invisible entity called God at all costs for years together without caring for any other support? Just as a faithful dog does not leave its master even when the latter punishes it, so is the attitude of a lover of God. The lives of Brother Lawrence, St Francis of Assisi, Sri Ramakrishna, Mira Bai, and a host of saints from every clime and creed stand as beacon lights of such courage and faith in spiritual life.

We now come to the fifth type of courage in the spiritual context, to wit, courage to face the truth. We grow up from childhood into adulthood under the protective care of our parents and guardians who carefully hide from us a number of truths about life. In answer to the innocent but critical queries of the children they either avoid it because of their own ignorance, or try to impose some superstitions like

fear or death of a loved one because they feel that particular truth as ‘sin’. They feel that unmitigated, undiluted truth may be devastating to their child’s wellbeing. All these forces act as devices to promote our self-blinding process. Often the parents or guardians consider it wise ‘not to wake up the sleeping lion’, since it would be difficult for them to control the awakened soul. But truth, as Swamiji has pointed out, is like a ‘corrosive substance of infinite power. It burns its way in wherever it falls—in soft substance at once, hard granite slowly, but it must’ (5.71). Truth cannot be kept hidden for a long time. It will make its appearance on the surface of our consciousness one day or the other. To bear its impact one needs a lot of self-awareness coupled with detachment of the will.

When the little boy Nachiketa wanted to see the truth, the king of death tried to dissuade him from that resolve by luring him to power, position, wealth, longevity, and everything a worldly person can aspire for. But the wise boy passed the acid test by holding firmly to his resolve.

Spiritual aspirants sometimes feel a divine discontent in their hearts after years of spiritual practice. Life loses all meaning for them. This, of course, is a temporary setback. As a matter of fact, this discontent is a harbinger of the dawn of truth. It is a test of the capacity of the aspirant to hold on to truth at all costs. Such crisis came to Swamiji also. During his itinerant days once he became disgusted with himself and decided to give up his body in exclusive meditation. So, he entered a trackless forest and spent the whole day walking without food. As a natural outcome, he became exhausted at sundown and lay down under a tree. There he saw a tiger approaching him. Swamiji resolved to offer his body as a sacrifice to the hungry beast, and quietly waited for the tiger to pounce upon him. But for reasons unknown, the tiger

retreated and disappeared into the darkness. Swamiji waited the whole night, but the tiger never came back. This is called courage to face the baldest truth of life, namely death, with a calm bearing.¹¹

Courage to be Human

We now come to the concluding and most important part of our discussion. We have already discussed two broad fields in which courage manifests, namely, secular and spiritual. The courage to be human is like the common denominator of the two. The human species has several distinctions above all other species. For the same reason, human beings experience much more mental sufferings than the physical sufferings of animals. These mental sufferings are called the pains of being human. In the words of Father Eugene C Kennedy,

Man cannot run away from this pain without running away from himself. ... He can narcotize himself in a hundred ways against it but at the high price of numbing himself to the very deepest meaning of life. Man can only face and deal with it honestly. Indeed, his manner of responding to its challenge becomes the best measure of his maturity.¹²

This response to the challenges is called the courage to be human. Generally, it is seen that our response to any threat is bestial. Whenever our ego is threatened, we try to counter it by reviling or backbiting. When we are humiliated, we stick to the maxim of retaliation. In other words, we tend to switch over to animal nature under straitened circumstances. Very rarely do we find people who possess the courage to assert humanness in exchange for all the crookedness and bestiality from the world. Swamiji’s short span of life brings home this fact. In fact, he lived mainly to demonstrate this indomitable courage to assert his humanness through thick

and thin. Despite so much defection, disloyalty, and antagonism from others, he went on doing good to them unstintedly. Towards the end of his life he proclaimed: ‘The older I grow, the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness. This is my new gospel.’¹³

Once Gautama Buddha went to a king’s court, where some sacrificial rites were being observed. A little lamb was made ready for sacrifice. But suddenly he entered the spot, and hearing the bleat of the lamb he rushed to the site, took it in his arms and asked the king quietly the purpose of sacrificing the lamb. The king replied that it was arranged in order to incur the merits for his subjects. Buddha then said: ‘O king, I am ready to sacrifice my body, which has earned a lot of merit, in lieu of the lamb’s. This body has committed no sin. You will incur more merit by sacrificing me.’ The king hung his head in shame and the upshot was that from that day onwards, all animal sacrifices were abolished in that kingdom. In recent past, Swamiji, inspired by the life of Buddha, wrote in one of his letters: ‘They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.’¹⁴

Another channel through which the inspiration for courage to be human descends is love. True, unselfish, detached love makes the impossible possible. The most touching illustration of this transforming power of love has been depicted in Victor Hugo’s immortal epic, *Les Misérables*. The hero of the story, Jean Valjean, was released from the gaol after a long period of rigorous imprisonment, with a passport that did not enable him even to buy a frugal meal in France. All the doors were slammed in his face. Overcome with hunger, thirst, and frustration, the man at last forced his way into the house of a reverend bishop. The bishop welcomed the stranger and ignoring his fierce appearance and the opposition from family members, made the

best arrangements due for a venerable guest. At night, when the guest was resting in the cosy bed provided for him, the old bogey of evil tendency once again raised its ugly head, and the man stole the gold and silver utensils arranged for his dinner. Next morning, he was caught red-handed by the vigilant cop sergeant and brought before Bishop Myriel for identification. But, to the consternation of the sergeant, the noble bishop said that he had gifted those vessels to the man. Not only so, but he handed over the remaining silver candle-stands to the man in front of the dumbfounded inspector Javert, who left the place disappointed. Through that small, momentary act of love, the bishop ushered in an unprecedented change in the life of the convict. What could not be brought about through years of incarceration was done in a few moments.

The reaction was revolutionary and phenomenal. Gradually the man became transformed into a great Mayor who saved the life of a poor cart-man stuck up under the wheel of his own loaded cart. Jean Valjean had gained the courage to exercise his humanness even though the law was breathing heavily down his neck. Was he not initiated from bestiality to humanness by Bishop Myriel? Again, he went to save the life of a poor woman assaulted by a mob. The woman could not survive the shock, but died peacefully after handing over the charge of her only little daughter to the Mayor. The daughter was in the custody of a hotelier. But long before reaching her, Jean Valjean was once again sent behind the bars. This time he fled, and released the child from the clutches of the hotelier for a huge ransom. Keeping himself carefully away from public gaze, he brought up the child, and after she came of age, married her to a suitable young man. But the most dramatic part of the story

is yet to be told. Inspector Javert was caught by a group of young rebels during a civil war. Jean Valjean happened to be present on the spot. The group unanimously gave the verdict of capital punishment for Javert. When no one felt to murder the unarmed captive, Jean Valjean took the onus of killing the man on himself. After everyone left, he set free his sworn enemy, the captive Javert, and fired the bullet in the air. The inspector could not believe his eyes. How could he know what revolution had transformed a criminal into a man! Torn between his conscience and duty, inspector Javert at last chose suicide as the only solution.

To many, this may be just a novel. But let us ask ourselves: 'Do we not encounter in our real life such cruelty and tough situations as has been depicted in this realistic, life-oriented novel?' Every moment our dignity of humanness is challenged, and we have to stand the acid test boldly. Epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata inspire us only because we find striking parallels in real life even in this modern age. This fact should never be lost sight of.

One who has once tasted the bliss of pure, unselfish love will not even care for any opposition from the world and will give love freely in an unbroken stream. Such a person will patiently and stoically bear all the pathos of being human. This is what we call the courage to be human.

End Note

Swamiji went one step further. In an enthralling poem he expressed the idea that one who is mature enough to give love will give only sweetness in return for harshness and cruelty. Such characters are not just found in novels. Even in this relentless world they move about incognito. Their role is like that of the unseen, unheard dewdrop that falls in the night hidden from the common gaze and brings into blossom

the fairest of roses. Those who come into the proximity of such people get completely transformed into real human beings. Here are the lines from a small poem by Swamiji entitled 'To an Early Violet':

What though thy bed be frozen earth,
Thy cloak the chilling blast;
What though no mate to cheer thy path,
Thy sky with gloom o'ercast;
What though if love itself doth fail,
Thy fragrance strewed in vain;
What though if bad o'er good prevail,
And vice o'er virtue reign:
Change not thy nature, gentle bloom,
Thou violet, sweet and pure,
But ever pour thy sweet perfume
Unasked, unstinted, sure! (8.169-70)



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6. 'Punyasya phalam-ichchhanti punyam nechchhanti manavah, na papa-phalam-ichchhanti papam kurvanti yatnatah.'
7. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.394.
8. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.1.
9. See Gita, 3.5.
10. *Complete Works*, 1.104.
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YOUNG EYES

How I Look at Dogs

Aadrika Chattopadhyay

I LOOK AT DOGS as human beings' best friends, but that does not mean we should cage them. If you want to keep a dog or any other animal as a pet then you have to wait until you grow up and earn, because to maintain a healthy pet, you need to earn. If you keep any animal in your house without properly taking care of it, it will feel tortured, and hence you would have to earn and give that pet much space.

We think that the dogs that are all over the streets are harmful and can bite. Yes, it is true that they can bite and also spread diseases, but just sitting at home and saying such things won't help. What would help is studying hard and doing something for them. And no, street dogs don't always bite. Now let me talk about a dog named Snowflake, who was always quite caring of me.

Once, when my friends and I went down the road cycling, my eyes fell on this dog who was bleeding from a wound on her head. Just then my friend told me it was a female because she had given birth to puppies earlier and the puppies were taken away and killed. My friends and I gave her some water and biscuits. The next day I gave her some water and biscuits. Like this, I kept giving her biscuits every day and suddenly I got the courage to touch her, and touched her. I told my parents what I had done. They told me that I had done something quite wrong and that I could have had caught some diseases. So I stopped touching the dog and gave her the name Snowflake. Then my father told me that

the people in our apartment building might take our apartment away because I was feeding a dog in the compound. In our compound, dogs are hated and many people have complained about dogs being in our compound, and I also stopped giving her biscuits to eat. When I went down to the ground level of our building, Snowflake came and started licking me. I told that to my father and he said that I might be infected with diseases. And now, Snowflake tries to lick me, but I don't let her.

This is the story of Snowflake. I have many other stories to share with you. So, let me tell you another story about many dogs in a dog show. My father, grandfather, and I went to a dog show, some time ago. When we reached the dog show, we saw dogs in small cages, and they were all barking. There were breeds like Dobermann, golden retriever, chihuahua, dachshund, German shepherd, Labrador, toy poodle, beagle, and Lhasa apso, but they all were underfed or overfed.

Taking dogs to a dog show is torturing them. If you want to exercise your dog, then let it run and play in a field or some kind of a garden, because taking it to a dog show is not exercising it or doing any good to its body. Just because you want to win and make your dog win some money and a trophy, you are torturing it. What I feel is that a street dog's life is better than a pet dog's life, because a pet dog has no freedom and is kept caged, while a street dog has freedom and can have whatever it wants, including meat. I and

my mom go out for morning walks sometimes, and then I see an old man giving meat and fish to street dogs. Some people even show love to street dogs, as with me and Snowflake. If you are fond of dogs and you are quite young, then if you have the permission, you can feed street dogs.

In a way, street dogs or any other dog is caged, because all dogs belong to the wild. We cut trees, which is their home and when we do that, the dogs get caged in the city and in that way, all dogs are caged. If dogs would be in the wild, then they would hunt and they might be eating us, but they still could be human beings' best friends. As far as I think, if you work hard, then one day you could get a dog. But remember, if you don't have the money to maintain a pet dog, then there is another way and that is to maintain a street dog.

In my experience, a street dog can be as loving and caring as a pet dog. So, think twice before you say no to a street dog. I think all dogs can be loving and caring if we show some love to them. A dog is loyal to its owner but we don't have that much of love for our dogs. So, keep your dog maintained and exercised. When we get a dog, we tend to give it toys like chewing bones and things like that, but those toys are

not edible. A dog, especially a puppy, would try to chew on your hands, but chewables and toys are not edible items. Instead, why don't you try to give meat to your dog? Even puppies would be able to chew it and it will be healthy for your dog. Remember to vaccinate your dog and then get it completely clean by the vet, because otherwise your dog is harmful enough to kill you, but it won't be your dog's fault, because there are some diseases that animals carry but they don't suffer from them. These diseases get passed on by animals to humans. So, you better not forget to vaccinate and clean your dog. Most dogs like golden retrievers and Labradors can play any game with you.

Some dog breeds like beagle and poodle need much exercise. So, if you have a dog, then don't forget to give much exercise to your dog. You should not make your dog wear any clothes because a dog is resistant to many diseases like cold. When your dog falls ill, then it is not because you have not made it wear clothes; it could be because of the pollution and some other reasons like that. In fact, your dog will feel tortured if you make it wear clothes. You should only make your dog wear clothes when the air conditioner is on!



BALABODHA

Ancient Wisdom Made Easy

Bhagavan

THE WORD ‘BHAGAVAN’ is a commonly used Sanskrit word. It is used by people, who do not even know Sanskrit, as it is present in almost every Indian language. The widely used meaning of the word ‘bhagavan’ is God. In many Indian languages, it also means an honourable person. However, it is necessary to see the other meanings and the origins of this word. This is a Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word ‘bhagavan’ is derived from the stem word *bhaga* by adding a *matup* suffix. *Bhaga* is derived from the root word *bhaj*, which means to divide, distribute, allot, apportion, share, grant, bestow, furnish, supply, to obtain as one’s share, receive as, partake of, enjoy, possess, have, to turn or resort to, engage in, assume, put on, experience, incur, undergo, feel, go or fall into, pursue, practise, cultivate, fall to the lot or share of, declare for, prefer, choose, serve, honour, revere, love, adore, deal out, put to flight, chase, cook, and dress food. *Bhaga* means dispenser, gracious lord, patron, good fortune, happiness, welfare, prosperity, dignity, majesty, distinction, excellence, beauty, loveliness, love, affection, glory, desire, knowledge, greatness, effort, dharma, moksha, lustre, sun, moon, part, wife, relative, characteristic, attendant, quality, mental state, essence, action, omnipotence, virtue, occult power, and dalliance. There is a god named Bhaga in the Vedas, who distributes wealth.

‘Bhagavan’ is a person having the qualities

of *bhaga*. A person who has the six qualities of complete sovereignty, valour, honour, prosperity, knowledge, and dispassion is called ‘bhagavan’. ‘Bhagavan’ also refers to one who knows about the creation and dissolution of the universe, the appearance and disappearance of living beings, and wisdom and ignorance. ‘Bhagavan’ means a form of God, the signs of the presence of God, illumined, omniscient, Lord Buddha, rishi, Atman, honourable, worshipful, adorable, prince, deity, Jina, glorious, illustrious, revered, venerable, divine, holy, fortunate, prosperous, and happy.

‘Bhagavan’ also refers to one receiving the bhakti of the devotees. Sanatana Dharma believes in the incarnation of God or bhagavan whenever virtue subsides and evil increases. Bhagavan is male in gender and the female equivalent is called ‘bhagavati’. However, many consider the term ‘bhagavan’ to be beyond gender.

This word is used in Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and Buddhist texts. In most parts of India, this word is also used as an honorific title to address a person of importance. The essence of the supreme Truth or Brahman is also referred to by the word ‘bhagavan’. A person who completely understands the meaning of this word attains holy wisdom and the gist of the entire Vedas. The letter *bh* means the cherisher and supporter of the universe. The letter *ga* means leader, impeller, or creator. The letter *va* denotes that fundamental spirit that pervades all beings. In its entirety, the word ‘Bhagavan’ denotes the supreme Lord, who is the creator, sustainer, and the destroyer of this universe.



TRADITIONAL TALES

Self-created Bondage

(Continued from the previous issue)

REMEMBERING HIS PAST LIFE, the confectioner in the form of the bull said with eyes full of tears: 'Sir, you have come after eight years just as I requested. But, what can I do? You can well see the poverty of my sons. If they continue in this manner in poverty, they will die out of starvation. So, please come after some more years and take me with you. Please allow me to help them now.' Hearing these words of the confectioner in the form of the bull, the sadhu felt compassion towards him, who was bound by attachment. The sadhu promised to return after some more years to free that soul, which was deluded at the self-created bondage and was unable to break it.

Some years passed. The sadhu's body was getting weaker by the day because of old age. He went again to the confectioner so that he could pay his gratitude and not have any debts in this world. However, he saw a dog dying in starvation in front of a dilapidated old house. The dog barked as it saw the sadhu and made the people in the house come out. The elder son came out hearing the dog's barking. The sadhu asked him about the family's condition. Then, he enquired about the bull that had been helping them. The elder son told the sadhu: 'Sir, that bull died a year ago. Do you know how helpful that bull was? It would not eat much. But, it toiled heavily for us, without any rest. The poor creature died! We would never get such a bull now!' The elder son thus highly praised the bull.

The sadhu could understand through intuition that the confectioner in the form of the bull

had now taken birth as the dog that was barking at him. After being born as a bull, the confectioner was now born as a dog because of his attachment to his sons, and was now guarding them. He was being a companion to his sons and was ensuring that no one takes away anything that belonged to them. The sadhu went near the dog that barked at him. By the power of his austerities, he reminded the dog of its previous births.

As soon as the dog remembered its past births, it fell at the feet of the sadhu and started shedding tears and said to the sadhu: 'Sir, you can well see the pitiable condition of my sons. Hence, how can I come with you leaving them in this condition? Therefore, if you come after some more time, I will immediately come with you.'

The sadhu thought with compassion: 'This soul is bound because of his previous actions and is suffering by moving in the cycle of samsara! Even after so much time, he cannot give up the bonds arising out of the petty ideas like "my wife" and "my children", and he cannot strive for attaining moksha.' Then, the sadhu accepted the request of the confectioner turned dog, and promised to return after some time, in his old age. Some time passed. The sadhu again went to the house of the confectioner's sons. He observed that the sons and their families were now in a worse condition than before.

Both the sons became angry at the sight of the sadhu. They thought: 'Every time this sadhu visits us, we end up being in a worse condition than before. It appears that he is the carrier of misfortune.' Hence, they started scolding the

sadhu. However, the sadhu said to them full of compassion: 'Children, you have become quite impoverished. Do you need money? If so, dig up the place your parents used for sleeping. There you would find a jar full of gold coins. You two can take it.'

Immediately, both the sons went to the place used by their parents for sleeping, dug up the place, and just after digging a little, a snake came out hissing. At the sight of the snake both of them stopped digging and angrily went to the sadhu to give a piece of their mind. Understanding their state of mind, the sadhu said: 'You are angry thinking that I lied. But, see the pit properly. There, you can see the tip of the jar. Do as I say. Both of you kill this snake.' The anger of both the sons subsided and they looked closely at the pit. They could see under the snake, what could be called the tip of a jar. Then, they beat the snake with full force and garnered all their strength to retrieve the jar. Heavily beaten, the snake died. The sons brought out the jar from the pit. Seeing a large number of gold coins, their joy knew no bounds.

However, the sadhu went near the dead snake and sprinkled holy water on it and started observing it unabatedly. It was the confectioner, who was reborn as a bull and then as a dog

because of his attachment to his family, that was born as a snake in this lifetime. Because he was killed and because of the great compassion of the sadhu, the confectioner in the form of the snake gradually became free of his attachments. The confectioner became very happy knowing that the sadhu will take him to Vaikuntha, the abode of Lord Vishnu, and get him moksha.

Selfish interest only brings misery. It was the inconsequential attachment of the confectioner towards his sons that made him take birth over and again in various lifetimes. He himself created more and more attachments. It was his lack of discernment that made him go through repeated cycles of births and deaths. Had he just met his obligations in this world without any attachments, he would have attained moksha in one lifetime itself by the great compassion of the sadhu.

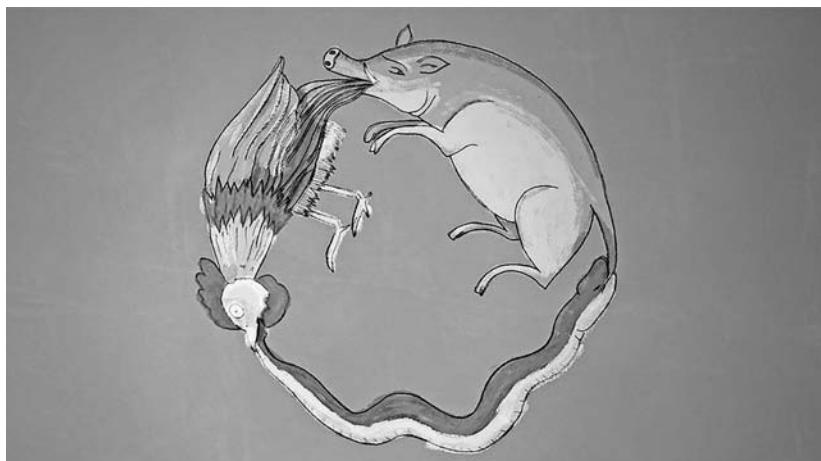
Therefore, we should meet our obligations without any attachments just like water that does not stick to lotus leaf. Let us pray to God that we get a suitable state of mind and mental strength to do so.¹



Reference

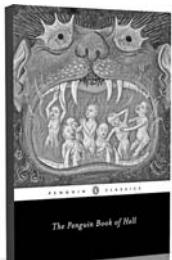
1. This is an adaptation of the story in Swami Ramakrishnananda, *Universe and Man* (Madras: Ramakrishna Mission, 1908), 103–13.

Tibetan Buddhist Painting of The Wheel of Life



REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



The Penguin Book of Hell

Ed. Scott G Bruce

Penguin Books, Penguin Random House LLC, 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA. Website: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com>. 2018. \$11.59. 304 pp. PB. ISBN 9780143131625.

Hell and hell-beings are found in all religions and all literatures of the world. Hells connote variously real suffering in other worlds; metaphorical suffering in this world and even the state in which say, animals are in. Hells can be imaginative constructs and history itself can be hellish. For example, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) maps an apocalyptic, possibly cannibalistic hell. And the history of America as constructed by Richard Slotkin in his *Gunfighter Nation* trilogy shows how America had been transformed into hell for Native Americans when white cowboys decided to conquer the American West. Alice Walker in *The Color Purple* (1982) charts the horrors of being a black in Wasp America. It is hell which is the alternative right in today's America and the rise of Richard B Spencer (b. 1978) with his neo-Nazi salutes have made Charlottesville a magnet for white supremacists. In other words, hells are relative and a white person's hell is very different from a coloured person's hell. Scott G Bruce being white has failed to provide a thick description of hell(s) in the book under review. One assumes that he is too privileged in white land to comprehend the 'darkness visible' in hells throughout history and in his own country, the US.

Descriptions of hell are to be found in Near Eastern cultures like those of the Hittites and the Numidians. They are found in all branches of Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. And, of course, within the Judaeo-Christian continuum.

The Penguin Book of Hell narrowly focuses on primarily Greco-Roman and Christian 'hellscape' without referring to Hittite conceptions of hell. The Israelites defined their hell after coming in touch with the Near East when they were fleeing Egypt. Bruce does not include any description of this proto-hell from Near Eastern cultures. How can there be a Judaeo-Christian anthology of hellscape without referring to Near Eastern hells? As a sourcebook on hell, Bruce's scholarship is at best archival in a pejorative manner. His presentations on why some medieval men chose to become Cistercian monks are repetitive and naïve. Contemplative medieval Christian spirituality arose because of European mysticism and not out of a fear of demons; Bruce's book makes one feel that the basis of Western monasticism is the fear of Satan and not the love for God.

Unlike most Penguin editions, this book is best avoided unless one wants to know what a first world scholar can get away with; had an Indian compiled this anthology then the latter would be thought deficient of meticulousness in naming the book, this is only to begin with. Nowhere does the editor say that his is a sourcebook on Greco-Roman, Christian, and white man's hells. In his *Introduction* Bruce grandiosely states: 'The tenacity of the belief in Hell in the modern world invites inquiry into its long history. Depictions of a punitive afterlife are as old as writing itself. Ancient Mesopotamians imagine a grim otherworld' (xiii). Nothing from Mesopotamia is to be found anywhere in this book. The worst is kept for the last: Bruce could have been more elaborate and systematic in his treatment of the hell that was the Abu Ghraib (253) detention centre operated by the US. Instead, he just provides an abrupt and cursory vision of that hell on earth. There is only one exception to this skewed anthology. Bruce's

excerpt from Vasily Grossman's description of the Nazi Treblinka extermination camp in occupied Poland is veritably what 'Not even Dante, in *his Hell*' could have imagined (233). Grossman's description of Nazi sadism needs to be quoted to show what the white Nazi is capable of:

The SS singled out for particular torment those who had participated in the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. The women and children were taken not to the gas chambers but to where the corpses were being burned. Mothers crazed with horror were forced to lead their children onto the red-hot grid where thousands of dead bodies were writhing in the flames and smoke, where corpses tossed and turned as if they had come back to life again, where the bellies of women who had been pregnant burst from the heat and babies killed before birth were burning in open wombs. Such a spectacle was enough to rob the most hardened man of his reason, but its effect—as the Germans well knew—was a hundred times greater on a mother struggling to keep her children from seeing it. The children clung to their mothers and shrieked, 'Mama, what are they going to do to us? Are they going to burn us?' Not even Dante, in *his Hell*, saw scenes like this.

After amusing themselves for a while with this spectacle, the Germans burned the children (236).

This book is remarkable for the non-existent scholarship in this field. Were all scholars to have open access to *The Penguin Book of Hell*, Bruce's puerile neglect of 'cosmopolitanism' would have cost him dear. Most books from the first world today need to be first made available in an open-access model and also, be possibly self-published. Those who scorn self-publication need to remember that no less than John Milton and Percy Bysshe Shelley freely distributed many of their seminal pamphlets through self-publication. In today's world if one is afraid of being open about their scholarship, then we know something is rotten in the state of publishing and academic excellence.

The Penguin Book of Hell misses its normative

aim in another area: Bruce does not discuss apocalyptic hells within any religion. Bruce cannot be bothered to read St John of Patmos, leave alone that superb apocalyptic hell described in *Anagatavamsa Desana: The Sermon of the Chronicle-to-be* (1993) translated by Udaya Meddegama. The arrogance of the publisher and the compiler leave a bad taste in the brain. *The Penguin Book of Hell* misses all fictional hells too, as has been mentioned above. We never get to hear of the hells of Stephen King, Paul Tremblay, or the hell that we find in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. Another hermeneutical problem with Bruce is that he does not define hell in any constructive manner. His hell is a word which has no essentiality. It is because of his lack of rigour that we do not ever know whether the anthologiser believes in hells or just thinks of hells as metaphors for suffering. This book fails because Bruce does not have the domain expertise of a philosopher of evil, that is, expertise in theodicy, to know where to start and where to end.

Four Views on Hell (1996) published as part of the Counterpoint Series by Zondervan is a more valuable Christian resource book for hell than the anthology under review. It is sad that expensive *Cambridge Companions* and *Norton Anthologies* in recent years are just quid-pro-quo cram books with little value. A case in point is the original *Cambridge Companion to St. Augustine* edited by Eleonore Stump (2001). The more recent version edited by David Vincent Meconi (2014) and Eleonore Stump is poorer as far as the collection of essays in the newer edition goes. *The Penguin Book of Hell* is a misleading dumbed down anthology with no meaningful annotation and not worth our attention. This book had great potential because it could have been a resource for Medieval scholars and also of scholars of both Dante and Milton. But except for being a non-plagiarised copy-paste hack-job, this Penguin anthology is less than a cram-book.

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MANANA

**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.
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**The Process Matters:
Engaging and Equipping
People for Success**

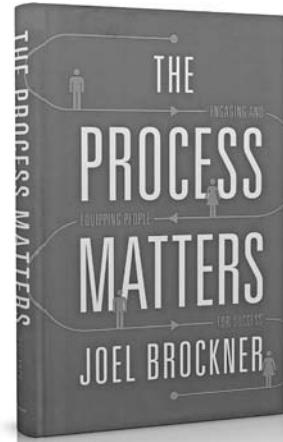
Joel Brockner

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. 2016. x + 320 pp. \$27.95. HB. ISBN 9780691165059.

SEE IF YOU CAN FIGURE OUT what these two situations have in common:

(1) John works for a high-powered investment bank. His work environment is always stressful, but this time he is really feeling the heat. His firm has had several bad quarters in a row. In a recent meeting with their boss, John and his team had been given a strict order: they needed to increase their contribution to the bottom line by 15 percent relative to the previous quarter. Seated in John's memory were his boss's parting words: 'I don't care how you get there, just get there.'

(2) I returned home late one night after taking part in a basketball free-throw shooting contest open to all members of the Columbia University community. I was feeling pretty good about things. Out of the fifty contestants who entered, I tied for first (making twenty-two out of twenty-five shots), which necessitated an overtime round between the other top finisher and me. The other person shot better than I did in overtime, so I finished as the runner-up. The next morning at breakfast, my three sons, then ranging in age from five to eleven, asked me how it had gone. I decided to make this a teaching moment, as in, there's more to life than winning and losing. So I proceeded to tell them that I had tried as hard as I could, that I really enjoyed the experience, and, oh, by the way, that I had come



in second out of fifty people. My sons brought me down to earth quickly: 'So, Dad, you lost!' they cried out, practically in unison.

At first blush these two situations seem pretty different from one another. But they also display a noteworthy commonality: our obsession with results. Indeed, several familiar expressions reveal the great importance we assign to outcomes, such as 'The bottom line is ...' or 'At the end of the day ...' Don't get me wrong—we should care about outcomes. Obviously we would rather succeed than fail, win rather than lose, and make more money rather than less. The problem is that all too often our obsession with results blinds us to the reality that how we get there, the process, also makes a big difference.

How the process is handled really matters to those on the receiving end of decisions. Just ask Jay Leno, the long time host of NBC's *The Tonight Show*. Jay didn't take it well when NBC replaced him with Conan O'Brien in 2009. Why? Was it because, after being No. 1 in late-night TV, he resented being told that his services were no longer needed? Was it because, at sixty, he felt hurt that someone ten to fifteen years younger would be replacing him? It is hard to know the real reasons, but his more recent reactions to being replaced by Jimmy Fallon (who is even younger than Conan O'Brien) give us some clues. As he

put it himself, ‘the main difference between this and the other time is I’m part of the process. The last time the decision was made without me. I came into work one day and [was abruptly told], you’re out. This time it feels right.’

Part of Jay Leno’s satisfaction the second time around was probably because NBC’s CEO, Steve Burke, made a point of meeting with Jay himself before any changes were announced. As Burke said after their meeting, ‘Clearly our goal has been to make this a smooth transition. Jay deserves to be treated like someone who has done a wonderful thing for our company for two decades.’ Another important member of NBC’s senior management team, Lorne Michaels (the creator of *Saturday Night Live*), agreed: ‘What has been key to this transition has been the absolute consideration for everyone’s feelings by all involved. It has been a transparent process.’ Jimmy Fallon also facilitated things by saying, ‘I have nothing but respect for Jay. If it weren’t for him, I wouldn’t have a show to be taking over.’

The Jay Leno example illustrates three of the central points of this book. First, look at how differently Jay reacted to the exact same decision when the process was done well rather than poorly. As the old saying goes, it’s not only what you do, but also how you do it. Second, doing the process well often entails simple things like involving people in decisions, showing respect, and doing things transparently. Not exactly rocket science. Furthermore, doing the process well may not require much in the way of people to show him real respect; this cost very little time or money. Third, given how much the process matters, and given the simplicity of doing it right, you would think that processes would be handled well more often than not. Sadly and alarmingly, this is not the case.

Hence this book: I will be talking about how doing things in the right way can make lots of important differences. It can have positive effects on

employees’ productivity and morale, on the academic performance of chronically underachieving students, on how ethically we behave, and even on how we feel about ourselves. The saga of Jay Leno is anything but an isolated case. I also will discuss what goes into doing things in the right way. The specific elements that affected Jay Leno’s satisfaction with the process are part of the story, but many other factors go into a high-quality process. I also will provide answers to the puzzling question of why doing things in the right way frequently fails to happen. After all, if something so simple and straight-forward can have such positive effects, shouldn’t it be done more often? What is getting in the way? By identifying the obstacles, we can figure out ways to deal with them, thereby unleashing the many benefits that result from doing things in the right way.

Mapping the Terrain

Throughout the book I will consider a wide array of situations in which two or more parties are interacting with one another, or have a relationship with one another, and are trying to complete some task or attain some goal. Most of my examples come from the workplace: for instance, how employees react to a significant change in their organization such as a merger or acquisition. I also will examine more microlevel workplace encounters such as one-on-one interactions employees have with their bosses. The book’s contents are also relevant to people in authority positions, such as parents, educators, and politicians. Moreover, the importance of how things are done also applies to our encounters and relationships with others who are important to us (family, friends) as we go about our various life activities.

In all of these situations, Party A is taking some action toward Party B that, from Party B’s perspective, consists of both a ‘what’ (outcome) and a ‘how’ (process).



REPORTS



Consecration of Sri Ramakrishna Temple at Aurangabad

New Mission Centre

The Phoenix Ashrama in South Africa, which was so long a sub-centre of Durban Ashrama, has been made a full-fledged branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission. Its contact details are as follows: **Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa-Phoenix**, physical address: '17 Forest Haven Drive, Foresthaven, Phoenix 4068', postal address: 'PO Box 60976, Phoenix 4080', phone: 27-315056693, email:<vedanta@ramakrishna-phoenix.org.za>, and website:<www.ramakrishnaphoenix.org.za>. Further, the sub-centre at **Johannesburg** has been kept under the supervision of **Phoenix** Ashrama. The sub-centre's contact details are as follows: **Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa-Johannesburg**, physical address: 'Unit 9, 108 on Blandford, 260 Blandford Road, Noordhang Ext. 79, Johannesburg', postal address: 'Postnet Suite 204, Private Bag X3, Northriding, 2162, Johannesburg' and email:<johannesburg@ramakrishna-phoenix.org.za>.

Commemoration of the 125th Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's Addresses at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, USA

The following centres held programmes mentioned against their names: **In India:** **Almora:** A public meeting on the Almora campus of Kumaun University on 25 October 2018, attended by nearly 400 people. **Baghbazar:** A spiritual retreat on 25 November, nearly 900 devotees participated. **Chennai Students' Home:** A students' convention on 26 October, about 500 students

from 16 schools participated. **Coimbatore Mission:** Cultural competitions in 13 schools and colleges in Coimbatore between 26 September and 16 October. In all, 2,085 students took part in the competitions. At all the venues, the competitions were followed by a talk, an awards ceremony, and a skit. **Indore:** An inter-school elocution competition on 27 October in which students from 13 schools participated. **Jammu:** A youths' convention on 10 November in which 140 youths took part. **Jhargram:** A spiritual retreat on 23 November in which about 1,000 people took part. **Koyilandy:** A public meeting on 21 October attended by about 250 people. **Mangaluru:** Lecture programmes in 33 colleges from September to November which were attended by about 7,500 students. The centre also observed a day-long music festival on 7 October, attended by about 800 people. **Mumbai:** A day-long programme at a public auditorium in Mumbai on 29 September, which included talks, screening of a documentary, and cultural events. Sri C Vidyasagar Rao, Governor of Maharashtra, inaugurated the programme; and Swami Suvirananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and a few others addressed the gathering. About 800 people, comprising mostly youths, were in attendance. **Mysuru:** Three students' conventions on 3, 4, and 6 October in which 708 college students took part, and three workshops for students on 3, 24, and 29 November in which a total of 981 students participated. **Pune:** A devotees' convention on 11 November attended by 350 devotees. **Sarisha:** A students' convention and a devotees' convention

on 6 and 7 October, attended by about 1,500 people. **Shillong:** A seminar on the topic 'Towards the Emergence of a Universal Religion' on 10 November, in which 70 people took part. **Vadodara:** An interfaith meet on 2 October, attended by 250 people. **Visakhapatnam:** Cultural competitions in four districts of Andhra Pradesh from July to November in which 49,698 students took part. In the first round 4,948 prizes were given and in the final round 16 students were awarded prizes and certificates. **Outside India:** **Durban, South Africa:** A public meeting at the Pietermaritzburg sub-centre on 2 October in which Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, and others delivered speeches. **Faridpur, Bangladesh:** A public meeting on 11 November in which Swami Suvirananda and a few others spoke. **Gretz, France:** A programme on 30 September consisting of meditation, talks, and music. The venue was a big boat, which went sailing on the River Seine in Paris while the event was in progress. Sri Vinay Mohan Kwatra, Ambassador of India to France, and others numbering about 240 participated in the programme. **The Netherlands:** A programme of talks, recitations, music, and video shows in Groningen city on 18 November. **New York Vedanta Society, USA:** An interfaith conference on 17 November, which was attended by about 200 people. **Phoenix, South Africa:** Public meetings on 25 September and 1 October at the Johannesburg sub-centre and Phoenix centre respectively, which were attended by about 700 devotees in all. Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj addressed both the meetings. **Sacramento, USA:** Three special lectures and two musical concerts in September and October attended by about 200 people.

News of Branch Centres

The newly set-up High Dependency Unit at

the hospital of **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal** was inaugurated on 10 October.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the new monks' quarters and a multipurpose hall at **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Kamarpukur** on 14 November.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Aurangabad conducted a three-day programme from 16 to 18 November in connection with the consecration of its Sri Ramakrishna Temple. On the first day, Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj and Srimat Swami Shivamayanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated Vivekananda Hall and monks' quarters respectively. Srimat Swami Vagishanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, consecrated the new temple on 17 November, the day of Jagaddhatri Puja. Public meetings, religious discourses, and cultural events were held on all three days, in which 325 monks and about 5,000 devotees participated.

Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj laid the foundation stone for the proposed girls' high school building at **Ramakrishna Mission, Shivanahalli** on 22 November.

Ramakrishna Math, Bengaluru celebrated the platinum jubilee of its Vidyarthi Mandiram, students' home, from 23 to 25 November with public meetings and cultural programmes. Swami Suvirananda presided over the public meeting held on the last day.

The headmistress of Higher Secondary School (Main) of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chennai** received Mahatma Gandhi Leadership Award from NRI Welfare Society of India (UK Chapter) at the House of Commons, London, on 25 October.

Relief

Flood Relief: Kerala: Centres continued relief operations among the families affected by the devastating floods that had hit the state in the month of August. (a) **Haripad** centre distributed 5,596 kg rice, 700 kg flour, 3,927 kg dal, 552 litres of edible oil, 348 kg assorted spices, 458 kg salt, 1,582 packets of biscuits, 350 kg milk powder, 98 kg tea leaves, 1,371 kg sugar, 1,053 saris, 1,954 assorted garments, 1,286 lungis, 478 bedsheets, 1,917 towels, 816 mats, 878 plates, 380 tumblers, 352 buckets, 344 mugs, 804 tubes of toothpaste, 804 toothbrushes, 383 vials of antiseptic lotion, 1,224 bars of bathing soap, 350 kg of washing powder, 700 packets of vessel-cleaning soap, 700 vials of hair oil, 483 mosquito-repellents, 737 sanitary items, 700 packets of candles, 229 packets of matchboxes, and 444 kg bleaching powder among 726 flood-affected families in Haripad from 27 to 30 August. (b) **Kalady** centre distributed 4,000 sets of utensils—each set containing a pressure cooker, 2 pots, 5 plates, 2 cups, 3 tumblers, 5 spoons, and a ladle, 6,679 shirts, 6,235 trousers, 4,200 lungis, and 9,269 ladies' garments among 4,000 affected families, and 13,016 notebooks, 5,895 pens, 13,000 geometry boxes, and 147 crayon boxes among 15,491 students, in Ernakulam district from 23 October to 28 November. (c) **Koyilandy** centre distributed 200 sets of utensils—each set containing a pressure cooker, 2 pots, 5 plates, 2 cups, 3 tumblers, 5 spoons, and a ladle, and 200 solar lamps among 200 affected families in Kannur and Wayanad districts on 10 and 25 November. (d) **Kozhikode** centre distributed 1,000 sets of utensils—each set containing a pressure cooker, 2 pots, 5 plates, 2 cups, 3 tumblers, 5 spoons, and a ladle, 3,234 assorted garments, 11,688 notebooks, 1,612 drawing books, 1,894 geometry boxes, and 4,563 pens among 1,500 flood-affected families and 4,454 students in Kozhikode and Pathanamthitta districts from 3 to 27 October. (e) **Pala** centre distributed

300 sets of utensils—each set containing a pressure cooker, 2 pots, 5 plates, 2 cups, 3 tumblers, 5 spoons, and a ladle, among 300 flood-affected families in Kottayam district on 24 October.

Cyclone Relief: (i) **Odisha:** Continuing its relief work among the victims of the cyclonic storm Titli, **Bhubaneswar** centre distributed 1,000 saris, 800 dhotis, 200 lungis, 500 blankets, and 200 mosquito-nets among 500 families in Gajapati district from 31 October to 3 November. (ii) **Tamil Nadu:** In the wake of the devastating cyclone Gaja, which severely affected several districts of the state, **Chennai Math** commenced relief work by serving more than 62,000 plates of cooked food—rice, pongal, and so on—to affected people in Nagai and Thiruvarur districts from 18 to 22 November.

Fire Relief: (i) **Arunachal Pradesh:** In a fire incident at Yoji Yora village, 2 houses were completely burned down. **Aalo** centre distributed 30 shirts, 45 trousers, 7 jackets, 30 sweaters, 45 belts, 25 wallets, and 2 sets of utensils—each set containing a karahi, a pot, a kettle, a bucket, 4 plates, 4 bowls, a ladle, a jug, a tumbler, a mug, and a pan, among the victims on 18 November. (ii) **Assam:** In response to a fire accident at Bagchipara in Dibrugarh town, **Dibrugarh** centre distributed 11 saris and 8 dhotis to the victims on 15 November.

Distress Relief: The following centres distributed various items, shown against their names, to needy people: **India:** **Bamunmura:** 1,086 shirts and 962 trousers from 7 to 14 October. **Barisha:** 600 shirts from 14 October to 18 November. **Gourhati:** 90 saris in November. **Jhargram:** 350 saris and 30 dhotis on 13 October. **Karimganj:** 70 shirts, 70 trousers, 50 dhotis, 50 saris, 90 notebooks, 90 pens, 90 erasers, and 90 pencil-sharpeners on 7 October. **Malda:** 966 shirts, 692 trousers, and 59 sweaters among men, and 269 tops, 141 shirts, 318 trousers, 162 leggings, and 30 sweaters among women, from 13 August to 13 October, and 397 school bags among students from 4 July to 26

September. **Nattarampalli:** 76 churidars, 43 saris, 45 lungis, 45 towels, and 240 children's garments on 5 and 6 November. **Saradapitha:** 882 saris from 29 September to 12 October. **Sikra-Kulingram:** 132 saris and 45 dhotis from 24 September to 4 October. **Silchar:** 2,757 saris, 500 dhotis, 3,000 shirts/T-shirts, 3,000 trousers, 200 packets of Horlicks, health drink, and 1,00,000 halogen tablets from 14 July to 12 October. **Vrindaban:** 430 kg rice, 430 kg flour, 107 kg dal, 107 kg mustard oil, 21 kg turmeric powder, 215 kg salt, 21 kg tea leaves, 43 kg milk powder, 107 kg sugar, 215 bars of bathing soap, and 215 phials of hair oil among 215 old women in Vrindaban on 17 November, in addition to the regular monthly distribution of ration conducted by the centre. **Bangladesh: Syllhet:** 100 dhotis and 375 saris on 15 October.

Synopsis of the Ramakrishna Mission Governing Body's Report for 2017-18

The **109th Annual General Meeting** of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 16 December 2018, at 3.30 p.m. A synopsis of the report presented in the meeting is given below.

Some of the major awards received by the Ramakrishna Mission together with its twin organisation Ramakrishna Math and their branches in the year 2017-18 are as follows: (i) Divyayan Krishi Vigyan Kendra of **Ranchi Morabadi Ashrama** was awarded **Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Rashtriya Krishi Vigyan Protsahan Puraskar** at the national level by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. (ii) **Ramakrishna Math** and **Ramakrishna Mission** were listed in the **World Book of Records**, London, as a spiritual movement working for the harmony of religions. (iii) **Kamarpukur** school and **Narendrapur** Vidyalaya received the **Best School Awards** from the School Education Department, Government of West Bengal. (iv) Vivekananda College of **Chennai Vidyapith**

secured the third position under the colleges category in the all-India Swachchhata rankings.

In commemoration of the **150th birth anniversary of Swami Abhedananda**, four national seminars on Indian Culture and Philosophy, and a number of other programmes were held at different centres of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

The **150th birth anniversary of Sister Nivedita** was celebrated by the headquarters and a number of branch centres in India and abroad. Nearly 55,000 people attended 115 seminars and conventions held in this connection, and about 50,000 students took part in the cultural competitions. A few new books on Sister Nivedita were also published in different languages.

New branch centres of Ramakrishna Mission were started in: (i) **Goa**, (ii) **Lumding**, Arunachal Pradesh, (iii) **Jhargram**, West Bengal, (iv) **New Town**, Kolkata, (v) **Davanagere**, Karnataka, and (vi) **Dibrugarh**, Assam. A sub-centre of Lucknow Mission Sevashrama was started at **Ayodhya** in Uttar Pradesh.

In the **educational field**, the following **new developments** deserve special mention: (i) NAAC awarded A++ grade to the College of Education at **Coimbatore Mission** centre and A+ grade to the Vivekananda College of **Chennai Vidyapith**. (ii) UGC conferred autonomous status on Vivekananda Centenary College of **Rahara** centre for six years. (iii) **Visakhapatnam** centre started *Vivek Institute of Excellence*, which conducts life-enhancing courses and programmes mainly for the youth. (iv) Our centres in **Coimbatore**, **Vijayawada**, and **Visakhapatnam** added smart classroom facility to their schools.

In the **medical field**, mention may be made of the following **new developments**: (i) **Itanagar hospital** started four new departments: Oncology, Plastic Surgery, Cardiology, and Ayurveda. (ii) **Lucknow hospital** was accredited by NABH

(National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers) for a period of three years. (iii) A cardiac catheterisation laboratory and a cancer centre were set up at **Vrindaban hospital**. (iv) **Varanasi Home of Service** started dental and dialysis units and a pharmacy. (v) Many of our hospitals and dispensaries added new **medical equipment** to their diagnostic laboratories.

In the **rural development field**, the following **new projects** deserve special mention: (i) **Chennai Students' Home** built a community hall at Poovalambedu village in Tiruvallur district. (ii) **Ranchi Morabadi** centre developed watersheds covering 6,969 hectares of land and started two projects to conserve a variety of scented rice crop. The centre also undertook a Seed Village Programme in which farmers were trained in the production of paddy seeds. Under this programme, farmers from 25 villages produced 1,025 quintals of paddy seeds.

A number of our centres took forward *Swachchha Bharat Abhiyan* by holding cleanliness drives and awareness campaigns. Special mention may be made of **Mangaluru** centre which conducted the following: (i) 184 cleanliness drives in and around Mangaluru. (ii) Cleanliness drives in 332 villages of Dakshina Kannada district. (iii) 426 awareness programmes in 110 schools covering nearly 44,000 students.

Under **Ramakrishna Math**, the following **new projects** deserve special mention: (i) New dispensary buildings were constructed by **Antpur** and **Nagpur** centres. (ii) **Cooch Behar** and **Rajkot** centres added extra floors to their medical units. (iii) **Nattarampalli** centre constructed an annexe to the school building. (iv) Coaching-cum-vocational training centre was started at **Bagda Math**.

Outside India, the following **new developments** deserve special mention: (i) The newly built Sri Ramakrishna Temple at **Jessore**,

Bangladesh, centre was consecrated. (ii) **Phoenix**, South Africa, centre built a kitchen-and-dining-hall building at a home for terminally ill patients in Inanda, South Africa. (iii) **Dhaka**, Bangladesh, centre celebrated its centenary, and kindergarten of **Singapore** centre observed its silver jubilee.

The Mission and Math undertook several **relief and rehabilitation** programmes in different parts of the country involving an expenditure of ₹ 44 crore, benefiting 10.53 lakh people.

During the year, the Mission undertook **welfare work** in a number of ways, including providing scholarships to poor students and pecuniary help to old, sick, and destitute people. Expenditure incurred was ₹ 17 crore.

Medical service was rendered to more than 72.74 lakh people through 10 hospitals, 80 dispensaries, 40 mobile medical units, and 928 medical camps run by the Mission. Expenditure incurred was ₹ 227 crore.

Nearly 2,31 lakh students studied in Mission's educational institutions ranging from kindergarten to university level and also in non-formal education centres, night schools, coaching classes, and the like. A sum of ₹ 324 crore was spent on the **educational work**.

A number of **rural and tribal development** projects were undertaken by the Mission with a total expenditure of ₹ 71 crore, benefiting about 42.86 lakh people.

We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to our members and friends for their kind cooperation and help in carrying forward the service programmes of Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math.

16 December 2018

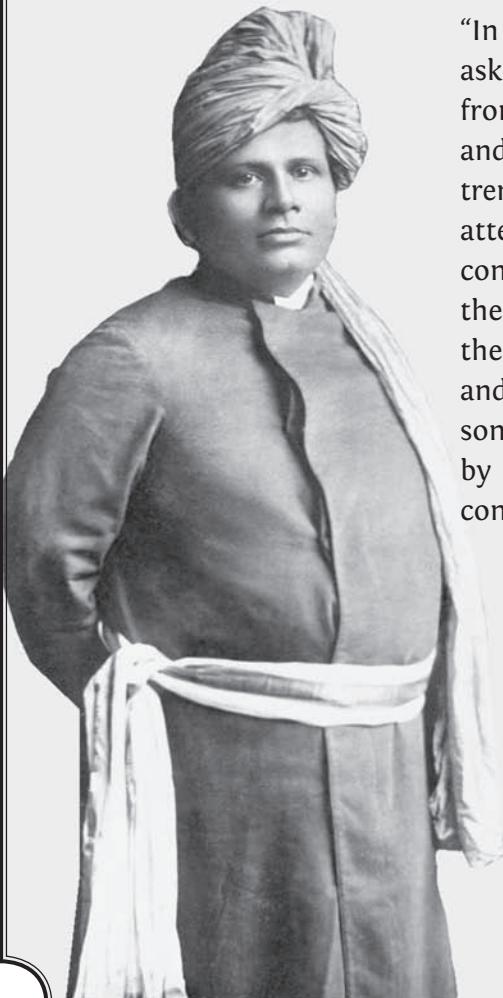
Swami Suvirananda
General Secretary



Corrections · January 2019, p. 254, left col., line 30: Read *Mundaka* instead of *Mandukya*. January 2019, p. 257, Reference No. 6: Read *Mundaka* instead of *Mandukya*.



*1911 picture of San Francisco
Old Temple Auditorium where
Swami delivered his lectures*



"In the spring of 1914, Swami Trigunatitananda asked one of the students to criticize his lectures from the standpoint of language, diction, style, and delivery. The student noticed an increasing tremor in speech. When it was brought to Swami's attention, he replied, "I have tried my utmost to control it so that it would not be noticeable to the audience, but even now, just as I go on to the platform, my Divine mother appears to me and fills me [with] such feeling of love that it is sometimes difficult for me to articulate. When by great effort I have brought the voice under control the tremor remains".

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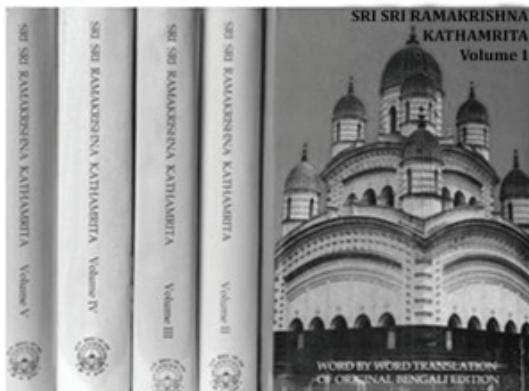


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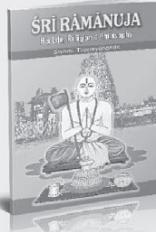


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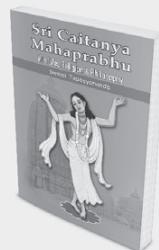
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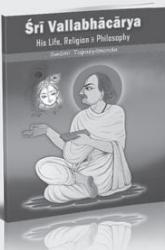


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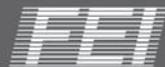
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Aiming Higher

An Appeal

Dear Devotees,

Please accept our greetings and best wishes.

The temple at Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Nettayam, Thiruvananthapuram was constructed between 1916 and '24. Revered Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, the spiritual son of Sri Sri Takkur and the first President of Ramakrishna Math, laid the foundation stone of this Ashrama in 1916 and Revered Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj consecrated it in 1924. Revered Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj, another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna had visited this Ashrama and got Sri Sri Takkur's vision in the shrine. The Ashrama is located on a hilltop at Nettayam in Trivandrum. This hundred year old Ashrama is an ideal place for worship, japa and meditation and an inspiration for sincere spiritual aspirants. Many senior monks of Ramakrishna Math had stayed and did tapasya here. Devotees visiting this serene, calm and holy place feel a spiritual current and often expressed it.

Due to ageing this important shrine is in a dilapidated condition and often leaks at multiple places during monsoon and as such a thorough revamping of the roof and other parts of the structure including the rubble construction is required to be done immediately to preserve it for posterity. The repair & renovation project will cover civil, electrical and structural work is estimated to cost rupees 52 lakhs. Ashrama has to mobilize this amount immediately for completing this noble work as early as possible so that the next all Kerala Sri Ramakrishna Devotees' Conference in May, 2019 can be held in the renovated Ashrama.

We earnestly request you to donate generously for this holy endeavor and be blessed by Sri Ramakrishna.

Praying for the blessings of the Holy Trio,

5th December, 2018

Yours in Sri Ramakrishna,
Swami Mokshavratananda,
Adhyaksha.

Donations may be sent in favor of "Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Thiruvananthapuram" in the above address or deposited in any of the following bank accounts directly with an sms to (mob)8289916882.

Savings a/c Name & No.

1. State Bank: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Charitable Hospital **30549599482**
IFSC:SBIN0004685 Jawaharnagar Branch
2. Syndicate Bank: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Charitable Hospital **40182200003630**
IFSC:SYNB0004018 Sasthamangalam Branch
3. Canara Bank: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Charitable Hospital **0821101007005**
IFSC:CNRB 0000821 Sasthamangalam Branch
4. FCRA a/c: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Charitable Hospital **0821101008404**
SWIFT Code:CNRBINBBTDC

Ramakrishna Ashrama

Sasthamangalam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala 695 010, India

Phone: 0471-272 2125, 272 2453, 272 6603, 272 7393 & 272 7607; Fax: 0471-231 3502

E-mail:thiruvananthapuram@rkmm.org; Website: www.ramakrishnaashramahospital.com/





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The best guide in life is strength. In religion, as in all other matters, discard everything that weakens you, have nothing to do with it.

—Swami Vivekananda



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